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Submissions of papers for consideration (to last no more than 30 minutes in delivery) are welcome. We plan to publish some of the conference papers in a separate volume or in the IBTSC Amsterdam journal *Baptistic Theologies*.

If you are interested in presenting a paper, please send the title and a short description for consideration to:

Dr Toivo Pilli (toivo@kolmtalenti.ee) before 15 January 2018.

For further information and for registration by 15 March 2018, contact: toivo@kolmtalenti.ee

Contents

Editorial	iv
Whisper to a Scream: How Loudly Should We Speak Up for Women in Ministry Leadership?	1
Anna Robbins	
I want to preach like a woman: Catherine Booth as ‘antagonistic subject’	15
Stuart Blythe	
Gender Relations in the New Testament: A Feminist Anabaptist Reading	33
Fran Porter	
‘The Longest War’: Gendercide	49
Cathy Ross	
Feminist Theology, Baptists, and the Bible: an Italian Perspective	66
Elizabeth E. Green	
The Bible, Character Ethics, and Same-Sex Relationships	78
Marion Carson	
Book Reviews	92
Lina Toth (Andronovienè)	

Editorial

When we first considered producing an issue of *Baptistic Theologies* on the theme of ‘gender’, there were two things we did not envisage. One, that I should be the only male contributor to this edition. Two, that all the articles, with the exception of one, would focus on the experience of women in church and society. What we have, however, reflects the concerns of those who agreed to write and have produced work for this edition. This highlights three general matters worth comment. First, theology and theological reflection are deeply contextual. People write out of their own experience and context. This does not mean that what they say does not have more general significance or importance. Rather, it identifies the perspective from which they approach issues, which itself is part of the contribution they are making. Second, the ‘inequality, disadvantage, and subordination’ of women in church and society remains a source of frustration if not at times of anger. This, therefore, remains a matter requiring time, attention, discussion, and advocacy. Third, there are a wide range of other interconnected and distinct issues related to the topic of gender that also require to be addressed with appropriate concern and sensitivity.

In the first article, Anna Robbins discusses the ordination and leadership of women in the church, as she reflects upon her own context and experience. She affirms William Webb’s redemptive movement hermeneutic with respect to understanding Scripture and its ethical significance. She maintains, however, that the ongoing disadvantaging of women requires to be viewed as a justice issue. This means that addressing the topic requires more than simply as it were the ‘whisper’ of person to person conversations but a more vociferous ‘scream’. This is necessary if the situation is to be changed, not simply at an individual but at a structural level. For Robbins, this concern with the structural as well as the individual reflects a baptistic way of approaching such matters.

The struggle for women to gain equal recognition in Christian ministry is not a new one. Stuart Blythe discusses the contribution of Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army, to this struggle. In his article he focuses on her 1859 pamphlet *Female Teaching*. Drawing upon some contemporary feminist homiletical theory, he analyses the ‘register’ of her arguments in order to ascertain the distinct contribution which she brought to this subject as a woman. Among other things he argues that writing this pamphlet played a part in developing her own identity as a feminine subject and woman preacher.

Fran Porter's article focuses on biblical hermeneutics, with respect to Scriptural passages that traditionally have been used to limit the role of women in churches and church leadership. She argues that traditional narrow interpretations of these passages have to be viewed with some suspicion as to how they were created and are sustained. Feminist and Anabaptist readings, however, the latter with their Christological emphasis, offer an expanded and more expansive reading of these traditional texts. Drawing on the metaphor of different camera lenses, Porter highlights the way in which these alternative readings offer a different view of the texts in terms of the role which they ascribe to women in the church.

Cathy Ross widens the discussion beyond the church. She demonstrates that women face various forms of violence related to the fact of being women. The information and statistics she provides are disturbing and challenging with respect to both the quantity and nature of the gender related violence women face in the world today. Drawing on various feminist theories, she argues that such violence results from various expressions of oppression against women. In response to these oppressions, she offers various missional responses. These responses reflect a strategy of 'resistance' to the situation of 'gendercide' she has described.

Elizabeth Green examines feminist theology and the Bible in relation to a particular national context. Green focuses on Italian Baptists and the ways in which feminist theology has been encouraged and developed. She locates her discussion in their particular cultural and ecumenical context. While on one level her work is a description, her article is also a demonstration of the application of feminist thinking to the analysis of a contextual situation. As part of her discussion she, interestingly, raises the necessarily related issue of male identity, writing: 'As the construction of male and female (masculine and feminine) are mutually related, any change in the one automatically calls the other into question. Yet men are still slow to make the change.' This is a theme not really developed in any of the other contributions.

Marion Carson, in contrast to the other articles, writes on the issue of same-sex relationships and the church. Her concern is not to argue for a particular view on this subject, although she notes the widely held traditional view. Rather her concern is to reflect upon what sort of pastoral responses should follow from the different views, and how unity can be kept in the church, when this issue can be so contentious. Her proposal is that asking of Scripture the character ethics question, 'What kind of people should we be?' moves beyond the question, 'What ought we to do?' and frames the discussion in a wider context. This context of correct character, she argues, should lead to appropriate integrity, honesty, and humility and should mean

that we extend care to those with whom we are involved, including those with whom we disagree.

Revd Dr Stuart Blythe (Rector IBTSC Amsterdam)

Whisper to a Scream: How Loudly Should We Speak Up for Women in Ministry Leadership?¹

Anna Robbins

This article portrays women's ecclesial leadership as a justice issue by first considering the complex nature of defining that term and its relationship to power. Establishing it as a justice issue, through the ultimate ethic of William Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic, available options are explored for pursuing that ethic within a mixed baptistic setting where there is disagreement on the issue.

Key Words

Justice; Women; Leadership

Introduction

It was twenty years ago when I left my home family of Baptists for another family of Baptists in the United Kingdom. When we left, the issue of women's ordination and leadership was a hot potato on the floor of our union and in the churches. As a recent seminarian, the challenge to minister as women, without becoming embittered by the incessant arguments, was ever before us.

Five years ago, we returned from our new home to our old home. One of the first things I did was attend our annual assembly, where the discussion on the floor was *still* women's ordination and leadership. It was as though fifteen years had not passed. Meanwhile I had experienced the freedom to lead, develop, and grow without having to defend myself at every turn. Structurally there were still challenges, to be sure, but on the whole I thought that times had finally changed.² Part of the frustration with finding things in the same place I had left them was that the denomination officially examines and recommends women for ordination at the hands of their local churches.

¹ A version of this paper was presented first as a lecture at a meeting of the Atlantic Society for Biblical Equality held at Crandall University, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada, in September 2013.

² While I hoped things had changed, I knew that in many places around the world they had not. Contacts across Europe, and further abroad through the Baptist World Alliance, led me to understand the matter as an almost universal justice issue for the church.

It is then given to congregations to decide their position. But, when we gather as a family, this is who we are and this is what we affirm. Or so I thought.

On the occasions that I have posited women's leadership as a justice issue, worthy of pursuit through structural change, there has been a mixed response. From supporters comes unreserved, surprisingly militant applause. From opponents, a response of reactive defence, as if under pressure. It becomes an issue of conflict because it is an issue not only of theology, but of power.

In this paper, I intend to portray women's ecclesial leadership as a justice issue by first considering the complex nature of defining that term, and its relationship to power. I will then seek to establish it as a justice issue, instead, through the ultimate ethic of William Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic. Finally, I will explore the options available for pursuing that ethic within a mixed baptistic setting where there is disagreement on the issue, considering the divisibility of justice posited by Reinhold Niebuhr and moderated by Nicholas Wolterstorff. I hope to encourage the active pursuit of women's leadership in the church as a response to the grace of the gospel rather than as a power play amongst churches and leaders.

Parameters of a 'Justice Issue'

Marriage. Racism. Bullying. Energy access. Access to legal services. Animal rights. Accountability and standardised testing.

Describing a phenomenon as a 'justice issue' doesn't make it one, but a quick Google search of the term yields myriad possibilities on the first results page. It has become a catchall phrase, used sometimes to highlight a matter that rightly demands consideration, and sometimes employed to shut down the possibility of debate around an issue. The assumption is, of course, that if you describe something as a 'justice issue', then it is a matter worth pursuing until a specific outcome is achieved.

Writing in *First Things*, Michael Novak cites Friedrich Hayek, and reminds us of the difficulty of defining what constitutes a social justice issue when the term itself is fraught with competing interpretive meanings, if a definition is offered at all. As a term,

It is allowed to float in the air as if everyone will recognise an instance of it when it appears. This vagueness seems indispensable. The minute one begins to define social justice, one runs into embarrassing intellectual difficulties. It becomes, most often, a term of art whose operations meaning is, "We need a law against

that.” In other words, it becomes an instrument of ideological intimidation, for the purpose of gaining the power of legal coercion.³

Novak suggests that Hayek gets to the heart of the matter by insisting that social justice is a virtue that may

properly be ascribed only to the reflective and deliberate acts of individual persons. Most who use the term, however, ascribe it not to individuals but to social systems. They use ‘social justice’ to denote a regulative principle of order; again, their focus is not virtue but power.⁴

In essence, we are moved from a free society to a demand society. Thus emerges a significant challenge to define any matter in the church as a justice issue. Rather than seeing justice as something achieved through the ‘virtuous practice by many individuals’, it is seen as a ‘utopian goal achieved by coercion’.⁵ The matter of whether this is an appropriate view of social justice needs to be considered at least briefly.

Justice is often defined as fairness, related to the distribution of goods or rights. A biblical conception of justice goes much deeper than that. From creation to consummation, justice is presented as reflecting the heart of God, and it is intrinsically relational. Isaiah, in particular, helps us to grasp the inexorable connection between our relationship of righteousness with God, and our relationships of justice with one another. An interruption in one relationship corrupts the other. When they flourish, they flourish together. That is not to suggest that all will agree on all matters. Rather the things we are committed to pursuing as significant in this life also must be significant in our lives with God. They cannot simply be our personal agendas or plays for power. They will, instead, be reflective of the power of God at work in his Kingdom.

Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch did not define justice in individual terms either. He saw the Kingdom of God at work in resisting the Kingdom of Evil, which countered its claims and values.⁶ Pursuing justice meant living out the love of God as directly applicable to society, and working for the establishment of the Kingdom through love instituted in the structures and organs of society. He saw the reality that individuals are often constrained from being their better selves because of the structures they inhabit. Love as justice requires the direct application of love to culture and society, through changing government legislation, and the structures of exploitative business.⁷ In other words, justice was all about ‘utopian goals’ achieved by legislative ‘coercion’, if not moral persuasion.

³ Michael Novak, ‘Defining Social Justice,’ *First Things*, 108 (December 2000), p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶ See Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1917).

⁷ See Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1912).

It is not baptistic, then, to focus only on justice in the life of the individual and avoid structural social or political transformation. I have established elsewhere that our moral life is comprised of individual and collective aspects.⁸ As Christians, costly discipleship, reasoned deliberation, and pursuit of virtue are all worthy approaches to ethics. Yet, as theologians including Rauschenbusch have reminded us, there is a collective moral existence that seems to take on a life of its own. This collective existence comprises our structural reality, and it comes to act back on individuals in ways that shape their discipleship, deliberation, and virtuous pursuits.

Nevertheless, this back-and-forth encounter between individuals and structures must remain dynamic. Structural injustices are recognised, but they are not regarded as entirely morally debilitating to the individual. As Baptist pastor Martin Luther King Jr preached, ‘We must not let the fact that we are victims of injustice lull us into abrogating responsibility for our own lives.’⁹

We can affirm, then, that justice must be understood biblically as relational and involving the activity of God in the world, as well as human activities in relation to the planet and each other. We can also affirm that justice seeks the living out of particular values by individuals and their realisation within the organs and structures of society. Activism, as ‘the expression of the gospel in effort’, is, after all, a hallmark of evangelicalism.¹⁰ Individual Christians are responsible to live in a manner consistent with their highest commitments; and they are to pursue those commitments within the structures they inhabit, not for the accrual of power for themselves or for the church, but for the transformation of collective life for the common good as an activity of the Kingdom of God.

However, recognising that Kingdom activity is ultimately God’s activity, and acknowledging the potential limits of collective transformation, will prevent our pursuit of justice from being utopian or coercive. Niebuhr will help us further with this as he understood justice to be a divisible concept. But we will come to that in the third section. For now we will explore a useful way of approaching the biblical text in order to identify what might constitute a justice issue from a biblical perspective. Although we are never free of our contextual and theological biases, an approach to the text

⁸ See Anna Robbins, *Methods in the Madness: Diversity in Twentieth-Century Christian Social Ethics* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2004).

⁹ Martin Luther King Jr, ‘Some things we must do’ sermon, December 5, 1957, King Center Archives, Atlanta Georgia, cited Andrew M. Manis, ‘Martin Luther King: The Greatest American (Prophet)’, in *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*, ed. by Larry L. McSwain (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ This refers of course to the now infamous four elements that characterise evangelical faith in David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 2-3.

is needed to challenge our attempts to simply read our own agendas into the text.

The ‘Ultimate Ethic’ as a ‘Justice Issue’

As an ethicist, I have found the work of William Webb to be helpful in gaining an understanding of the complex relationship between the original culture, the words of the text, and its application to contemporary culture. His redemptive-movement hermeneutic offers a way of approaching ethical issues that moves away from a very restricted reading of the text, and opens a dialogue between cultures with respect to understanding the main principle, or teaching, of a text. It allows us to do the work that is the calling of Christians; namely, to figure out how the text is best applied in our present situation, in very concrete terms. It is insufficient to simply read the text as isolated or stagnant words on a page. It is also insufficient to render the text into abstract forms that never work out in real life. It is further insufficient to gain some understanding of how the text might have been received and applied in the culture to which it was originally birthed and directed. Indeed, *all* of these things need to be brought together into a contemporary application where the words of the text are given life by recognising their relationship to culture past and present. On the whole, that is what the biblical hermeneutical exercise is all about.

In his book, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* published in 2001, Webb describes his redemptive-movement hermeneutic. Original culture represents the Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures that were the context of God’s revelation recorded as scripture. A movement from culture to text is redemptive — it moves the original culture in an ethical direction intended by God through his revelation. Here, an ethical direction or movement may be detected from the original culture to the text, as well as throughout the text itself, from Old to New Testaments, for example. If our culture then looks back to the words of the text in isolation from culture, it can yield a regressive ethic that is static. By contrast, if our culture discerns the movement to and within revelation, by understanding meanings of words beyond the words themselves, we will be able to identify a movement towards the Ultimate Ethic, which is the eschatological reality revealed through scripture and uncovered through faithful exegetical reading. It is that reality we are moving towards in Christ.¹¹

¹¹ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

For example, and as a cursory summary, slavery was widespread in ancient cultures. In the Old Testament, the people of God become slaves and their relationship with him is defined by the deliverance from slavery he provides. 'I am your God who led you out of Egypt...' ¹² In the New Testament, household laws provide guidance for the fair treatment of slaves, and Philemon is instructed to welcome Onesimus back, not as a slave but as a brother. In modern history, Wilberforce campaigned for the end of the transatlantic slave trade. And today, anti-trafficking organisations are widely supported by Christians who regard slavery as an offence to the image of God in humanity. The ultimate ethic here is abolishment of slavery. And so we work towards that ethical outcome. Although slavery is present in the Bible, the movement from culture to text, and through text to culture, is one of freedom from ownership of one human being by another.

A redemptive-movement hermeneutic offers further a dynamic application of Bible to life in contemporary culture. A static approach 'often fails to let the winds of Scripture advance its slavery portrait,' as 'it stifles an absolutely crucial component of meaning from the slavery texts for our generation'. Conversely, Webb believes 'Christians ought to welcome the biblical spirit 'blowing on the sails' of our contemporary setting with movement-type ideas.' When it comes to slavery, for example, 'the text holds multifaceted implications for our modern work world'. When the text is

reapplied in our modern context, the same biblical spirit voices a concern for improving the plight of the modern worker....it passionately, not reluctantly, pursues the positive well-being of all within the organisation, whether management, labourer or owner. It speaks to issues such as benefits, a family-supportive environment, people-first values and meaningful motivation as well as to bottom-line issues. ¹³

In the years since Webb published his book, it has received mixed reviews and birthed vibrant debate. Some herald it as offering an approach to textual application that is appropriately mindful of the role and dynamics of culture in biblical interpretation. Others suggest that Webb's approach compromises scripture. There is the matter of the approach still resting on proper exegesis of the text, and the matter of identifying with confidence the nature of the ultimate ethic that is revealed in Scripture.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Tom Schreiner points out that Webb's discussion often comes down simply to exegesis, with which he differs. He also contends that Webb perhaps has not paid sufficient attention

¹² These are words that set the paradigm for God's relationship with his people and introduce the Decalogue in Exodus 20.

¹³ Webb, *Slaves*, pp. 54-5.

to the trajectory of salvation history and its fulfilment in Christ.¹⁴ It is, however, Webb's point to engage with culture and not only the text itself.¹⁵ Reviewing the book in the *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies*, Wayne Grudem suggests that 'Webb's trajectory hermeneutic nullifies in principle the moral authority of the entire New Testament' and as such is 'deeply flawed'.¹⁶ Where Grudem differs ultimately from Webb is also an exegetical matter, though perhaps he fails to recognise the influence of his own cultural context on his hermeneutic, which goes some way to explain his approach to the text in a more static fashion.¹⁷

Many have found, and will yet find, that Webb's suggestion of an ethic that is a continuation and forward movement from what is contained in the New Testament text sits uncomfortably with them. However, there must be a moment of sober acknowledgement that all hermeneutical work, for preaching and for ethics, in some sense, moves 'beyond the bible'. I. Howard Marshall notes that this is not only the reality in the development of doctrine, but in the ownership of the text, where human leaders 'so identify themselves with a policy that they justify from the sacred text that any challenge to their authority can be treated as a challenge to the authority of the text'.¹⁸ He makes particular note of the external pressure that has prevented some organisations from releasing a version of the Bible that seems to support a more egalitarian view of the role of women, demonstrating that translation itself is a battleground shaped by concerns beyond the text.¹⁹

Webb demonstrates the practical reality further in his book on corporal punishment, where he shows how even conservative evangelicals move beyond the Bible in their ethics all the time, as they introduce conditions by which corporal punishment should be administered, demonstrating movement from the words of the text.

Engaging the debate with theological colleagues, Webb affirms that we go beyond the Bible every time we shake hands at church rather than greet one another with a holy kiss. There is nevertheless an important point that, if, of necessity, we need to move beyond the Bible in order to live faithfully and ethically today, then we must have some coherent way of

¹⁴ Tom Schreiner, *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 6:1 (2002), 46-64.

¹⁵ In a response to Schreiner, Webb points out that there is little real difference between them. Though they agree on the 'finality of the NT as the apex of revelation', Webb acknowledges that the practical fulfillment of a fully realised social ethic is not present in the New Testament. See William J. Webb, 'The Limits of a Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: A Focused Response to T. R. Schreiner', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 75:4 (2003), 327-342.

¹⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies*, 47:2 (June 2004), 299-346.

¹⁷ The influence of his culture on Grudem's own approach is evident in the opening pages of his *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002).

¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 31.

¹⁹ Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, p. 21.

treating the text as central within that movement. This is what Webb offers to us, regardless of what misgivings there may sometimes be about his method. While some jettison the text entirely, treating it as an historical curio, Webb gives evangelicals a way of holding to the authority of the text, as it moves in a dialogue with its community of hearers. Though Webb himself is a 'little uncomfortable' with the words 'beyond the bible', his work has sparked a lively discussion that has influenced a generation of theologians and pastors.²⁰

The ultimate ethic portrayed by Webb in relation to men and women is one of equality. To be fair, this method is one that will appeal best to someone who is asking questions about the issue of women in leadership, or is already committed to the equality of women and men, or is predisposed to redemptive movement. For example, while Grudem acknowledges value in what Webb shows about slaves, he rejects what he says about women on the same basis. The hermeneutic helps those who are open to a non-static reading of the text move to a contemporary application. And, although Webb offers a full exegesis of related texts, his interpretation differs from very conservative theologians who prefer a static reading, or who exegete on the basis of *a priori* theological commitments.

It is not within the purview of this paper to engage the exegetical arguments around texts related to ministry leadership by women. Webb demonstrates convincingly the movement from ancient culture to the text and movement within the text, particularly considering Jesus' treatment of and engagement with women. There are clear implications of this movement in applying this text to our present context. If Webb has clearly established that equality of men and women is an ultimate ethic, then we ought to understand it as a justice issue that requires individual commitment as well as structural transformation.

There are two reasons for considering women's leadership or equality as a justice issue. First of all, an ultimate ethic fulfils the direction of God's Spirit at work within his people, representing perfected relationships between people and God, and people with one another. Second, in the ultimate ethic there is an eschatological imperative that is a fulfilled end, embodied and lived by Christians now. As children of the Kingdom of God, we do not simply await fulfilment. Rather, we live it out as a reality in the world we inhabit as people of hope in between the now and not yet.

So, once we are convinced that Webb is correct, and that the redemptive-movement trajectory points to an ultimate ethic of equality of men and women, that may subsequently be regarded as a justice issue, what

²⁰ William J. Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

is the correct method to address contemporary cultural injustice represented by the exclusion of women from church leadership? This is the main question that this paper will now address.

Pursuing the Ultimate Ethic as Divisible Justice

Five years ago, I was teaching a course in Toronto. A number of guest lecturers were hosted at a supper one evening including Bill Webb. In conversation I began a mini-rant about how, if the equality of women and men represents an ultimate ethic, then we need to address the plight of women in the church as a matter of justice, and not just state it as a matter of fact. I had little basis for my emotive claim at that time. Webb responded to me as he does in the original book, that he believes an issue like this is best dealt with slowly, and carefully, without declaring any major revolution. I indicated that was how I previously had approached it, but things seemed only to get worse and never better. I argued that, as an ethicist, I was coming to believe that if a matter is one of justice, then Christians are obligated to pursue its rectification with singularity, and with noise. At that point we agreed to disagree, but would revisit the conversation again, not least before I prepared a very early version of this paper for a conference presentation.

Essentially, pursuing justice for women in leadership is a two-fold task. There is the negative aspect, that is, calling out injustice where it exists; and the positive aspect, that is, seeking ways and means of realising the ultimate ethic of equality in lived contexts. But how loudly should we engage this two-fold task? Should it be pursued with a whisper, or a scream?

When it comes to a whisper, there are a lot of advocates. For women who serve as leaders within a context of mixed views, it is easiest to stay under the radar, and not draw attention to the fact that you are there. Some women simply do not want to be identified with feminism, or, ‘women’s issues’ don’t interest them. Some are not convinced enough of their own position and calling to put their reputation on the line.

It is the nature of the issue that Webb argues demands a softer, more nuanced response. ‘Let me caution against overly simplistic argumentation once common hermeneutical ground is agreed upon’ he begins as he recounts an example to support his approach:

Imagine a fictitious conversation between two individuals who are committed to a redemptive-movement hermeneutic; one is complementary egalitarian and the other is an ultra-soft patriarchalist...The egalitarian might be inclined to say that the conclusion is obvious: “Not only should the church community move redemptively toward ultra-soft slavery and ultra soft patriarchy, but it also should

accept the inevitability of an egalitarian position as it historically has accepted abolition.²¹

Webb suggests that this is not so obvious as it may seem:

The drawback with such reasoning, however, is a major difference between the two cases. There is a marked difference between “the last thing to go” when moving from ultra-soft slavery to abolitionism and “the last thing to go” when moving from ultra-soft patriarchy to egalitarianism. With ultra-soft slavery the crux is *ownership*; with ultra-soft patriarchy the last vestige of that position before moving to egalitarianism is some kind of minimalist *hierarchy*. It is much easier to argue that no human being should ever own another human being than to argue that no human being should ever exist in a hierarchical relationship to another human being. In fact, I cannot argue the latter. There are numerous social relationships where hierarchy makes good sense.²²

Though appreciative of the cultural nuancing engaged here, I am concerned that Webb’s view on this point seems inconsistent with the redemptive spirit he has described. Certainly, his work has forwarded the cause of equality in many ways, and he has paid a high price personally for that. So I am not here attacking Webb, but rather wondering if he has been consistent in his approach, and whether he has gone far enough in following through the ethical implications of the redemptive spirit.

If we agree with Webb’s basic contention that there is movement in Scripture towards greater female participation in church leadership, and we also agree with him that the redemptive spirit will continue to move the church in the direction of an ultimate ethic, it then matters what that ultimate ethic looks like. And that is the job of exegetes everywhere to demonstrate the principles behind the texts. In this case, it is clear that in a whole Bible approach, the ultimate ethic is characterised by love and wholeness (*shalom*). Though it leaves room for differentiation, it does not leave room for inappropriate hierarchical authority to be used and abused. In the eschaton, there will be no more mourning, or racism, or sexism, for the former things will have passed away.

There will, of course, be those who now will want to revisit the exegetical argument and, as I have indicated, that is a well-trodden path. I set out with a different task. Having already committed to the principle of equality, based on the exegetical and hermeneutical work of others, I argue that we need to manifest in the midst of the contemporary church that future reality of love and *shalom*. This inevitably means pursuing relationships of equality: not simply turning a blind eye to racism, but actively countering it; not simply waiting for the day when Jesus will come again and sort out male-female relations, but living them out redemptively today. It means addressing

²¹ Webb, *Slaves*, p. 48.

²² Webb, *Slaves*, p. 49.

one another as brothers and sisters; it means speaking to the structures of our churches, and seeking reconciliation for past wrongs. If we whisper in our pursuit of the ultimate ethic, or justice issue, it may be because we recognise we are on a contextual journey. It cannot be because we are afraid.²³

In Reinhold Niebuhr's work we read that, just as Rauschenbusch recognised, love is at the heart of all Christian ethics. But Niebuhr suggests that, while love applies to the ethical lives of individuals, it cannot apply directly to collective existence. On an individual level, one can seek forgiveness for sin, access the grace of God, and live a life motivated by love.²⁴

When dealing with people personally then, one-to-one or in small groups, whispering may be the most appropriate method. I have never felt the need to shout about this issue in individual relationships with people. Though I have often felt like screaming in frustration, I have never been in a situation where screaming would help anything. Rather, through relationships, people are drawn by the whisper of one life lived in the context of community to reconsider their view. Sometimes God's redemptive spirit is not in the revolution but in the still small voice of evolution; the Spirit at work in conversation. Gradual changes lead to a transformed heart and mind, that goes on to transform others still. The whisper is one way to demonstrate the love of God to others; that, though we differ in our views of gender equality, we yet choose to recognise one another's humanity and family resemblance.

Niebuhr recognised, however, that love applied to structures and groups was another matter. When dealing with structures and groups, he observed, the moral tendency is towards the lowest common denominator. Because individual sin is compounded in a group setting, it is much more difficult and almost (though not quite) impossible for a group to access God's grace and apply his love to the situation in a way that is not merely self-serving. In fact, in groups, the will to power over others is an overwhelming tendency, and the will of a few can be manifested as a sinful reality that becomes embedded in structures and institutions.

These are the much more insidious manifestations of inequality than the rejection of one or another colleague who doesn't much like a woman in the pulpit, unless she is dusting it. These are the manifestations of sin that prevent human beings from flourishing, and from being all that they can be in Christ, not simply by the will of their brother and sister they face, but by

²³ Another example of Baptist theology working towards an ultimate ethic of equality is found in the work of US President Jimmy Carter. See his book, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

²⁴ See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man: Volume 1: Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941).

the will of the group manifested in structures that exclude, denigrate, objectify, and ignore. The result is that the weaker group is left without a voice, questions its own worth before God and others, and the sin of pride in the offending group is manifested in the oppressed group as a sin of retreat. The sin of retreat leads the weaker group to find refuge with its own kind; to limit the scope of ministry to what is acceptable; to limit contact with those who maintain the oppressive structures.

Surely being silent is not sin, but survival, we think. For some this may be true. However, I argue it may well be sin for those who neglect opportunities present to them, because it turns prejudice and oppression into an acceptance of the *status quo*; it accepts this judgement on the personhood of another group by not countering its claims. It no longer offers those who exercise the sin of pride the challenge of an opposing view, whereby they may hear and be transformed by the whole gospel. It is a sin of omission.

When we are talking about groups, and structural sin, then, we are talking about corporate personalities. We are talking about groups taking on the characteristics of individuals, as they behave in sinful ways towards one another. However, because these groups do not have a singular will, as they are made up of individuals, it is much more difficult to access God's grace in such a way that the ethic of love may be applied directly into such situations. It is far too complex for that.

So, as Niebuhr argued, we turn from a language of love to a language of justice: understanding justice to be love as it is applied collectively. Love is total; justice is divisible. That means that in an attempt to manifest more and more of God's love, we must strive for ever better forms of justice. We may celebrate achievements, but the task is never complete. The cross of Christ always stands in judgement of our efforts as it reveals God's holy love, which is justice perfected as love. As it judges by its unattainability, it beckons us forward, collectively, in a scream. This is a two-fold scream. There is a temptation at the point of collective frustration to become shrill, and to scream at anything and anybody without a strategy, or a theology of action. This is unproductive, and reflects not a seeking of right relationships, but the quest for power described at the outset of this article, where justice is achieved by coercion. The scream I am talking about has two parts and, though aiming for harmony, it may sound dissonant to those whose ears are not accustomed to its tones.²⁵

Firstly, the scream of frustration, marginalisation, and exclusion must have a place and must be heard. A relational pursuit of justice will recognise the pain and the voices of those who have experienced injustice. This can only happen at the level of individuals as they meet face-to-face and hear one

²⁵ I think here of Lucy Winkett, *Our Sound is Our Wound* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010).

another's stories. Although much has been gained through truth-telling in many places in need of reconciliation, there are few spaces for truth-telling on either side of this particular divide. Listening to another means being open to redemptive movement. If no redemptive movement is deemed possible, listening becomes impossible. Yet the screams require expression. Fostering opportunities for women leaders to meet together for lament and encouragement is an important element of pursuing sex equality as a justice issue for the church.

Secondly, there are times when a stand must be taken, and the shouts must echo in the corridors. It is sometimes the only way to challenge the prideful inclinations of groups and the structures they have put into place. This meets the collective challenge that recognises the ways that structures may reflect and perpetuate the worst of humanity. Those who hold power within ecclesial structures are responsible to take the lead, particularly men. Men hold the preponderance of leadership in Baptist life, regardless of what gains may have been achieved in some regions. Women who have achieved leadership roles often hold silence on the issue so as not to compromise their position, but there are times and places for a well-spoken word or protest that can have effective resonances throughout organisations. This is essential on behalf of those women leaders emerging from a new generation who are often largely unaware of the prejudices that exist in ecclesial life. It comes as profound discouragement when they finally encounter them.

Nevertheless, it is the scream of positive action that is the best means of pursuing justice for women's equality in ecclesial leadership. As capable women lead, opportunities are opened, but they do not last infinitely. When doors are opened and women step through, there can be no let up, no resting. The push towards injustice is relentless until a culture is fundamentally transformed. At the same time, we must always recognise that our cries for justice will sometimes ring of our own prideful pretensions to power. The church and her faithful are never free from this temptation.

Love transcends law, but we acknowledge with Niebuhr that law and not agapic love governs group relations. Therefore, justice seeks to transform the legislated practices and behaviours of the unjust party. Its divisible nature always recognises better and worse. So, one may legislate rights, but at the same time strive towards voluntary acceptance, and loving endorsement. Legislative transformation need not be solely, or even primarily, coercive. For Niebuhr, there is no option but to pursue justice, in ever better forms, until justice is finally transcended by love in the *eschaton*.

Wolterstorff rightly notes a weakness in Niebuhr on this point. For Niebuhr, the *eschaton* represented 'a withering away' of justice, where

justice finally would give way to love's fulfilment.²⁶ Wolterstorff, by contrast, contends that, 'The coming of the eschaton represented for Jesus, not the withering away of justice, but its full rule. The relevance of justice is not confined to situations of conflict.'²⁷ Wolterstorff does not disagree much with Niebuhr's application of love as justice in this world; but he does take exception to the idea that justice will not be present in the *eschaton*, incorporated by love. As Wolterstorff indicates, 'there is justice in the Trinity'.²⁸ The relational aspect is maintained, and adds further impetus for the pursuit of justice as an activity of the Kingdom of God.

As a caution against our own potential turn to assert our own prideful will to power, and a call for all to check their own prejudices, Wolterstorff offers a caveat. In his proposal of care-agapism, Wolterstorff draws on the parable of the good Samaritan to yield the following ethical advice that is pertinent in our culture: 'Be open to recognizing the obligations that the needs of the other place upon one, and do not allow any in-group/out-group classifications to deafen one's ear or harden one's heart.'²⁹ This works two ways: to challenge those who are tempted to dismiss the role of women as a justice issue, and those who advocate for it. To manifest love in the midst of struggle is to surrender to grace rather than grasp at power.

Without simply seeking to wrest the reins of ecclesial power from those who maintain exclusion, even in a congregational context, we pursue the equality of women as a justice issue, identified as an ultimate ethic, and recognise its divisibility. Divisibility allows us to speak softly or in a roar, depending on our context, yet challenges us continually to pursue ever higher forms of justice. Though God's love and justice for women in church leadership is his to bring through fully restored relationships in the eschaton, we participate in this eschatological ultimate ethic now. Through the gift of his Spirit, it is ours to display, to manifest, to seek, in our own contexts, in whispers and in screams.

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²⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2011), p. 72.

²⁷ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, p. 72.

²⁸ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, p. 72.

²⁹ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, p. 133.

I want to preach like a woman: Catherine Booth as ‘antagonistic subject’

Stuart Blythe

In this article, drawing on current literature in homiletics, I introduce the analytical tool of feminine register coupled with a particular approach to feminine subjectivity. This approach understands that the ‘what and the when’, the ‘who’, and the ‘how’ of preaching are spheres where gender has a direct impact on meaning making. I apply this tool to the arguments of Catherine Booth, the co-founder of the Salvation Army, in her advocacy of female preaching as expressed in the 1859 pamphlet *Female Teaching*. In this way, I argue that it is possible to see how Booth, for the sake of transformation, negotiates gender roles adopted and projected in a process of denial and affirmation. In this process her own subjectivity is developed, as she functions as an antagonistic subject within and against the existing structures. Her woman’s voice is thus heard as one among other developing feminine subjects whose collective efforts aimed at bringing change.

Key Words

Female; Preaching; Catherine Booth; Subjectivity

Introduction

Making allowance for the novelty of the thing, we cannot discover anything either unnatural or immodest in a Christian woman, becomingly attired, appearing on a platform or in a pulpit. By nature she seems fitted to grace either. God has given to woman a graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and, above all, a finely-toned emotional nature, all of which appear to us eminent natural qualifications for public speaking. (Catherine Booth)¹

Catherine Booth (1829-1890) is best known as co-founder of the Salvation Army. The focus of this article is on her defence of women preaching, as articulated primarily in her pamphlet *Female Teaching*, first published in 1859. Through the discussion and analysis, I will argue that Booth’s contribution in a ‘feminine register’ allows her to be regarded as a transformative ‘antagonistic subject’ with respect to the practice of preaching. I will offer this analysis and argumentation, drawing upon

¹ Catherine Booth, *Female Teaching: Rev. A. A. Rees versus Mrs Palmer, Being a Reply to the Pamphlet by the above named Gentleman on the Sunderland Revival*, 2nd edn (London: G Stevenson, n.d. [1861]), p. 3, available <http://jesus.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/books/others/booth_c_female_teaching.pdf> [accessed 17 May 2017]

feminist theory. To discuss Booth's views with respect to feminist theory is not new.² Some interpretations are contested, indicating that the application of feminist theory to historical characters requires some care.³ I will be adopting a feminist approach articulated in a recent homiletical book by Jennifer Copeland entitled *Feminine Registers: The Importance of Women's Voices for Christian Preaching*.⁴ It is not my intention to argue that Booth was a feminist, nor that this pamphlet advocated a feminist agenda. It is rather to see the way in which the theory helps elucidate her contribution. This article, therefore, will simultaneously introduce some current homiletical theory with respect to the voices of women in preaching, while highlighting one such historic voice.

Preaching and Gender: Register as an Analytical Tool

Susan Durber, in her article 'A Pulpit Princess? Preaching Like a Woman' writes, 'Preaching has come to us as a gendered cultural form — for men.'⁵ Yet, as she admits, what it means to preach like a woman is complex because gender, rather than being something 'fixed and stable', is 'being constantly shaped, constructed, fought for and re-made within all kinds of cultural practices'.⁶ Copeland agrees with Durber's analysis, 'The fact remains... that preaching is a gendered cultural form and its conventionally conceived gender is masculine'.⁷ She is also aware of the difficulties. As a consequence, when Copeland applies feminist theory to homiletics in a desire to analyse the distinct contribution of women through preaching, she seeks to do so without reverting to an essentialist understanding of gender.⁸ For Copeland this non-essentialist approach requires understanding feminine gender as something in which women negotiate both their adoption of certain roles and the reality of having gender roles projected upon them.⁹ Kathi Weeks, one of the authors on whom Copeland draws quite heavily, describes such a

² Olive Anderson, 'Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflections on Feminism, Popular Religion, and Social Change', *The Historical Journal* 12:3 (1969), 467-84; Pamela J. Walker, 'Gender, Radicalism, and Female Preaching in Nineteenth Century Britain: Catherine Booth's Female Teaching' in *Strangely Familiar: Protofeminist Interpretations of Patriarchal Biblical Texts*, ed. by Nancy Clavert-Koyzis and Heather E. Weir (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), pp. 171-84.

³ Walker acknowledges that Andrew Mark Eason, *Women in God's Army: Gender Equality in the Early Salvation Army* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), disagrees with her reading of Booth. Walker, 'Gender', p. 176, footnote 16. She in turn critiques him for evaluating Booth on a notion of equality foreign to the period. Pamela J. Walker, 'Women in God's Army: Gender and Equality in the Early Salvation Army by Andrew Mark Eason', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 109:3 (June 2004), p. 976.

⁴ Jennifer E. Copeland, *Feminine Registers: The Importance of Women's Voices for Christian Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

⁵ Susan Durber, 'A Pulpit Princess? Preaching Like a Woman', *Theology & Sexuality* 13:2 (2007), 167-74 (p. 168).

⁶ Durber, 'Pulpit', p. 170.

⁷ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 123.

⁸ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. xi.

⁹ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. xi.

notion of the feminine subject from a feminist ‘standpoint theory’ perspective as a ‘being of becoming’.¹⁰ It is a term designed to avoid an essentialist understanding of gender on the one hand and a radically contingent non-essentialist understanding on the other, to retain the value of a ‘coherent and active willing subject’.¹¹ With this idea of subjectivity Copeland argues that women experience their life as women. When women preach, therefore, they preach with and indeed, Copeland argues, ‘should’ preach out of these experiences; it is what makes their preaching authentic and distinct:

Women should speak from our church’s pulpits, not by disguising the voice as generic and assuming essentialist femininity, but by proclaiming the truth of their own experiences. All proclamation is refracted through and hybridized by the structures around it - economic, cultural, political, and theological.¹²

Copeland’s feminist understanding of what it means for a woman to preach resonates with the call of Durber:

Now it is time for women to speak, and not by disguising their voices or by whispering demurely, but by beginning at last to be those who form words from their own experience and place in the world and who utter them in their own way. Women who speak in the Church (and one place in which to do that is the pulpit) are today finding that they have their own things to say, and that this is as much about content and production as it is about style and form.¹³

For Copeland, the distinct contribution women’s voices bring to preaching can be transformative for the practice of preaching. Drawing again on Weeks, Copeland argues that the potential for change ‘rests with those situated both within and against the current structure. Thus, women, while historically and often currently occupying a place of oppression within church structures, also emerge through the cracks in the system as the renovators of the structure.’¹⁴ In making this argument, it is noted that the power of socially constructed gender expectations cannot be underestimated, not least within an ‘ecclesial setting’ where ‘institutional forces are amplified by thousands of years of biblical interpretation, traditional patterns, and historical practice’.¹⁵ Yet, ‘these contingencies are not intractable or determinative’ and ‘The place where one participates in the practices that constitute one’s context is also the place where one begins to fashion practices that will alter this context’.¹⁶ Thus women bring change as they

¹⁰ Kathi Weeks, *Constituting Feminist Subjects* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 133-5.

¹¹ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 135.

¹² Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 73.

¹³ Durber, ‘Pulpit’, p. 171. Copeland at the end of her book discusses homiletics who, she says, encourage the sort of feminine register she is advocating: Christine Smith, Lucy Lind Hogan, Anna Carter Florence, Mary Catherine Hilkert, and John McClure, *Feminine*, pp. 95-121.

¹⁴ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 57.

¹⁵ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 58.

¹⁶ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 59.

subvert the existing context by desisting from some practices and creating new ones through their participation.¹⁷ This relates to Weeks' notion of the 'antagonistic subject'.¹⁸ The antagonistic subject for Weeks is one who is within a social system but who, through their very interrelated relationship with it, is also capable of subverting it.¹⁹ This subversion takes place through a simultaneous denial and affirmation of processes where:

we selectively will that which is active over that which is reactive, that which enables us to do and to be more over that which would limit or separate us from what we can do or be, that which augments our power over that which detracts from it.²⁰

To develop this further, Weeks focuses on 'irony' as a mechanism of denial and 'self-valorization', meaning the creation of practices that are alternative, as a mechanism of affirmation.²¹ In this respect, women who participate in the deeply male gendered practice of preaching function variously as transformative antagonistic subjects as they negotiate the gendered expectation of the role and practice through denial and affirmation.

Copeland also brings to this theoretical understanding of gender and its transformative potential a discussion on the specific sites in which gender can be seen to impact the practice of preaching. To do this she develops the 'linguistic concept of register' as an analytical tool for homiletics:²²

Register offers a process for understanding how meanings extend through and beyond the spoken words. Meaning comes to life by considering not only the words themselves but also the social contexts in which the words are spoken, the relationship between the communicating parties, and the method of communication.²³

Exploring register means giving attention to the variables of 'field, tenor, and mode' in the communication event.²⁴ Copeland interprets these as the 'what and where' (content and context), the 'who' (relational dynamic) and the 'how' (means) of communication.²⁵ Copeland argues that while gender may impact most the tenor, the 'who' involved in the relational dynamic, it impacts all three variables in different ways.²⁶ The variables also do not necessarily occur sequentially and different variables will have a greater impact than others in different situations. Changes in one will also affect the

¹⁷ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 59.

¹⁸ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 60.

¹⁹ Weeks, *Constituting*, pp. 92-3.

²⁰ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 137.

²¹ Weeks, *Constituting*, pp. 137-51.

²² Copeland, *Feminine*, p. xiii.

²³ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 48.

²⁴ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. xiii.

²⁵ Copeland, *Feminine*, pp. xiii-xiv.

²⁶ Copeland, *Feminine*, pp. 49-50.

others.²⁷ Meaning making, therefore, and gendered meaning making, takes place at the intersection of these variables when women preach.

For Copeland, therefore, it is in the variables that constitute register that the specific contribution of feminine voices can be heard as making a distinctive contribution to the practice of preaching with transformational potential. Following her lead, I will seek to analyse the contribution of Catherine Booth as a woman to the practice of preaching. I will do this by analysing her arguments in relation to the variables of register: content and context, the relational dynamics, and the mode of her communication. To be sure, as Copeland advances her arguments it appears that she is offering a way of exploring the actual event of preaching by women. Be this as it may, when she then ‘listens’ for the feminine register she focuses upon the theoretical contributions of several homeluticians.²⁸ I will be doing something similar with Booth. I will also go back beyond Copeland to the work of Weeks when this helps to deepen the perspective being adopted for analysis.²⁹

Female Teaching

The primary focus for my analysis of Catherine Booth’s arguments will relate to her pamphlet *Female Teaching*. First published in 1859, there appears to be no extant copy of this first edition. I, therefore, like some other later writers, will make use of the 1861 second edition and the later still 1870 third edition entitled *Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel*.³⁰ Walker suggests that the 1861 edition ‘is most probably only slightly changed from the first edition judging from her correspondence with her mother’.³¹ Andrew Eason, however, suggests that the second edition had been ‘revised significantly’.³² Booth, in the introduction to the second edition, states she ‘has taken the opportunity to enlarge and improve it’.³³ There is no real evidence, however, that Booth changed her views between the first and second edition and the way in which she enlarged it remains a matter of conjecture.³⁴ The third edition was published in 1870.³⁵ This

²⁷ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 67.

²⁸ Copeland, *Feminine*, pp. 95-121

²⁹ What is offered here is my analysis based upon my reading of these authors in relation to one another.

³⁰ Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel* (London: Morgan and Chase, 1870).

³¹ Walker, ‘Gender’, p. 176, footnote 16.

³² Eason, *Women*, p. 193, footnote 42.

³³ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 2

³⁴ In the 1861 edition Booth has a number of long quotations from Phoebe Palmer’s book *The Promise of the Father, or A Neglected Spirituality of the Last Days* (New York: Garland, 1859). Whether these were added to the later edition is an open question.

³⁵ Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel* (London: Morgan and Chase, 1870). Norman Murdoch, ‘Female Ministry in the Thought and Life of Catherine Booth’, *Church*

version contains the same basic arguments but reorganises and summarises some of the contents and omits the direct and personal comments to the Rev. Rees, to whom she was responding. As with the second edition, the revision is noted: 'all the controversial portions have been expunged, some new matter added, and the whole produced in a cheaper form, and thus, I trust, rendered better adapted for general circulation'.³⁶ Eason writes, 'Catherine was no longer directing her arguments towards Rees, but was now aiming them more generally at all opponents of female preaching.'³⁷ The change of title may also indicate her arguments are a justification for all female ministry within the church and not just preaching.³⁸ Booth's views on female preaching and ministry 'was an important guiding principle in the Salvation Army which institutionalized women's preaching and offered women greater institutional authority than any other British religious organization at that time'.³⁹ I will only refer to this third edition when it adds additional relevant material or phrasing.

Content and Context: What and Where?

In this section I will describe, analyse, and discuss Booth's content with respect to some of the contexts in which it was delivered. I will identify some tensions in her work and argue that these demonstrate her practice as antagonistic subject.

In *Female Teaching* Catherine Booth argued for the validity of female preaching in three main ways.⁴⁰ First, she argued that women were 'naturally' suited to preaching. Among the characteristics she claimed were natural to women and which eminently qualified them for public speaking were their 'graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and, above all, a finely-toned emotional nature', their 'delicacy and grace', and their 'moral and intellectual nature'.⁴¹ Indeed, Booth argued that the vocation of preaching, rather than rendering a woman 'unfeminine', could 'exalt and refine the tenderest and most womanly instincts of her nature'.⁴²

History 53 (1984), 348-62, bases his analysis upon this third edition as does Roger J. Green, 'Settled Views: Catherine Booth and Female Ministry', *Methodist History* 31:3 (April 1993), 131-47.

³⁶ Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 2.

³⁷ Eason, *Women*, p. 194, footnote 42.

³⁸ John Read, *Catherine Booth: Laying the Theological Foundations of a Radical Movement* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), p.161. Kindle.

³⁹ Walker, 'Gender', p. 181.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that, for Booth, prophecy, preaching, and teaching men and women in public, all referred to the same practice. This question of definition was picked up on by the Rev. J. Stacey in a correspondence with Booth in 1860. J. Stacey, Letter to Mrs Booth, cited in F. De L. Booth-Tucker, *The Life of Catherine Booth: The Mother of the Salvation Army*, Vol. 1 (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1892), p. 250. Her synonymous use remains apparent in the second and third editions.

⁴¹ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 3, 4, 23.

⁴² Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 4.

Her second line of argument, and the one to which she devoted most space, was her biblical arguments. She maintained that a woman's 'right' to preach was a feature of the Gospel dispensation when and where the Spirit was poured out upon both women and men so that they could 'prophesy' in fulfilment of Joel 2.28 and referred to in Acts 2.17.⁴³ Through the cross the previous limiting curse on women had been removed. This was demonstrated by the fact it was a woman, Mary, who was chosen to 'herald the glad tidings of a Saviour risen'.⁴⁴ In Christ the difference of sex in relation to the practice of preaching has been removed (Galatians 3.28).⁴⁵ When Paul speaks about women having to cover their head in order to prophesy and pray (I Corinthians 11.1-15), this supports the fact that women did preach in public, with the restriction not prohibiting but guiding how this should be done in keeping with 'the law of nature and of society'.⁴⁶ Since the apostle clearly permits women to preach, for the sake of consistency, his apparently prohibitive statements such as 'Let your women keep silence in the churches' (I Corinthians 14.34) and 'I suffer not a woman to teach' (I Timothy 2.12) cannot refer to the practice of public preaching but refer to different kinds of speaking.⁴⁷ She cites various examples from Scripture where women are seen to have a teaching responsibility to corroborate these arguments.⁴⁸ In the later edition, with greater nuance she draws first on examples of women from the Old Testament and argues that surely the new dispensation would bring greater rather than less freedom.⁴⁹ For Booth, women as men have received the enabling gift and calling to preaching. In *Female Ministry* she states, 'God does call and qualify women to preach, and His word, rightly understood, cannot forbid what His Spirit enjoins'.⁵⁰

Her third line of argument relates to the 'good' which women preachers have evidently done. This includes the theological argument that whatever dishonour women owned because a 'woman was the door by which sin came into the world' has been more than offset by the 'exaltation of the female sex' through the 'remedial results of Christianity'.⁵¹ Furthermore, the good that has resulted from female preaching is thus evidence of a good agency, as good fruit is the result of a good tree (Luke 5.43, 44).⁵² She reinforces her arguments by providing several examples, mainly from

⁴³ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁵ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 9-21. There are some quite detailed arguments about what 'speak' and 'teach' must mean in each of these passages but this is predicated upon the argument that Paul cannot be now forbidding that which elsewhere he clearly encourages.

⁴⁸ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 17-21.

⁴⁹ Booth, *Female Ministry*, pp. 15-19.

⁵⁰ Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 20.

⁵¹ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 21-3.

⁵² Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 26

Palmer's book *The Promise of the Father*, of when and where 'the public labours of women have been eminently owned by God in the salvation of souls'.⁵³

Booth's original pamphlet was a response to a pamphlet published in the same year by the Rev. Augustus Rees, minister of Bethesda Free Chapel in Sunderland, in which he outlined his reasons for non-participation in the so called 'Sunderland Revivals'.⁵⁴ One of the main reasons he gave for his 'moral and physical absence' was the nature of its 'agency', by which he meant that these revivals involved female teaching, something he declared as 'unnatural and unscriptural'.⁵⁵ The particular female he had in mind was Phoebe Palmer — an American Wesleyan evangelical revivalist who, with her husband, had begun a successful preaching tour in England in 1859 and with whom the fore-mentioned revivals were associated. Palmer herself was quite careful to try and limit offence by, as it were, preaching under the authority of her husband and by not preaching from the pulpit.⁵⁶ This stance was related to a theological conviction that women as such had no right to preach, could only do so under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and were thus claiming no right of their own or authority over others.⁵⁷ Rees, however, would have none of this. He made use of correspondence from Palmer's husband, Dr Palmer, to name what he considered was at stake:

Here it must be observed that Dr P. fully admits what some of his followers deny, viz., that 'a lady' may 'proclaim the risen Saviour.' Of course, he means publicly, for this alone is the question—he does not attempt to split hairs, as many do, by distinguishing between 'in the Churches' and in the Congregation—between speaking from the pulpit and speaking from the platform—between preaching and talking—between expounding and exhorting—he admits that the chief female agent in this movement, does and ought to 'proclaim' publicly 'the risen Saviour,' to men, women, and children.⁵⁸

Rees, having identified what he considers to be the issue, a woman preaching, is equally clear that he considers it a 'shameful' if not indeed an 'evil' practice, even if it may be argued that some good has come of it.⁵⁹ The content of this pamphlet had originally been a sermon delivered twice to his congregation and there was also talk of him publishing another.⁶⁰

⁵³ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 26-30.

⁵⁴ A.A. Rees, *Reasons for Not Co-operating in the Alleged Sunderland Revivals* (Sunderland: William Henry, 1859).

⁵⁵ Rees, *Reasons*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁶ Anderson, 'Women', p. 483.

⁵⁷ Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 28-30.

⁵⁸ Rees, *Reasons*, pp. 10-12.

⁵⁹ Rees, *Reasons*, pp. 14-17.

⁶⁰ Catherine Booth, Letter to her mother, Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 243. The letter was clearly written in 1859. Booth-Tucker indicates no specific date for this letter. Walker, when apparently referring to the same letter, dates it as 25 December 1859.

Rees writes of female preaching, 'This agency I cannot approve, (and I have reason to believe that nearly all the ministers in this town are of the same opinion) because, in my deliberate judgment, it is both unnatural and unscriptural'.⁶¹ It is fairly safe to suggest that he represented the perspective of dominant societal norms as reinforced by religious convictions in terms of both his understanding of what was 'natural' with respect to the role of women and in considering female preaching unscriptural. Anderson writes that the issue of female preaching in mid-Victorian Britain 'was deeply controversial for secular as well as for purely religious reasons' because it explicitly challenged 'the social convention that respectable women played no public role in mixed society' and 'Christian teaching that women should be silent in the church'.⁶² The views of Rees, therefore, represent the immediate and wider context into which Booth's views were articulated.

Booth's arguments could be read simply as reactive opposition. Whereas, however, it is certainly true that Booth aggressively disagreed with Rees, the analysis of her content in context requires more nuance. For in several places internal tensions can be seen in her advocacy of female preaching. This is the case with her argument about what is natural. She reasons that 'custom' and 'natural' are not the same. She argues that there is no reason why women, if they have the ability and intellect to pursue other goals, should be 'confined exclusively to the kitchen and the distaff' any more than men should be confined to the 'field and the workshop'.⁶³ On the other hand, in making these arguments she appears to accept and defend what were socially constructed understandings of women, their character, and their assigned domestic roles. Her claim indeed is that preaching does not negate these feminine qualities in a woman or stop her 'faithfully discharging the duties peculiar to her own sphere' such as working in the kitchen or rearing children.⁶⁴

Tension is also seen in her use of Scripture. Her argument is framed within a literalistic understanding of Scripture.⁶⁵ So she writes that Rees' arguments, 'if capable of substantiation by a fair and consistent interpretation of the Word of God, should receive our immediate acquiescence'.⁶⁶ Without denying a literalistic approach, however, she draws on others to use a particular though not new hermeneutical approach to argue for rather than against female preaching.⁶⁷ So far so good, but it can be argued from a feminist perspective that this means she does not suggest that Scripture itself

⁶¹ Rees, *Reasons*, pp. 4-5.

⁶² Anderson, 'Women', pp. 468-9.

⁶³ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁴ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Anderson, 'Women', p. 478.

⁶⁶ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁷ Walker, *Pulling*, p. 29

may be ‘complicit’ in creating the negative views towards women’s ministry.⁶⁸

A further example of tension can be seen with respect to what has been described as ‘the most innovative and ultimately significant aspect of her thinking’, which was her argument that women had the ‘**right**’ to preach as women.⁶⁹ This is in contrast to an alternative view which suggested women could preach but only under the specific prompting of the Spirit, making it something of an exception to the rule rather than a right for any suitably qualified woman.⁷⁰ Booth maintained that women had the ‘right’ to preach and ‘she has it independently of any man-made restrictions, which do not equally refer to the opposite’.⁷¹ Yet, this very statement was immediately qualified, as she continued ‘except when, as a wife, silence is imposed upon her by her own husband’.⁷²

Anderson claims that, despite her arguments for a woman’s right to preach, Booth ‘remained a firm believer in the subordination of women so far as their domestic and social position was concerned (at least in the period under discussion).’⁷³ This can be countered by pointing out that Booth places such submission in relation to the greater law of ‘love’ which removes ‘the sting’.⁷⁴ Yet, at least at the level of language, while Booth argued ‘that God has not subjected woman to man as a **being**’ for married women, she indicates that she was subjected by God ‘as a **wife**’.⁷⁵ While the curse has been removed, the ‘semblance’ remains and women ‘all but’ restored to their created place! There is, therefore, at least ambiguity with respect to Booth’s view of the subjection of a wife to a husband, even as she argues for the rights of women as independent beings.

If in highlighting the above tensions my point was to negatively critique Booth, I may, as with Eason, be open to the charge made by Walker and supported by Read of judging her by an anachronistic standard of equality.⁷⁶ My point, however, is different. It is rather to indicate that Booth can be seen negotiating roles adopted by and projected on women in a process of denial and affirmation. She, on the one hand, denies certain assumptions and practices, while on the other hand promoting certain practices and assumptions in a way that is subverting the status quo. This

⁶⁸ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 77.

⁶⁹ Walker ‘Gender’, pp. 178-9, emphasis is Booth’s.

⁷⁰ Walker, ‘Gender’, pp. 178-9,

⁷¹ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 30.

⁷² Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 30.

⁷³ Anderson, ‘Women’, p. 483. Eason also argues that Booth supported domestic ‘servitude’. Eason, *Women*, pp. 114-45.

⁷⁴ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 22. This is part of Read’s argument contra Anderson and Eason that Booth maintained a view of the subordination of a wife to her husband. Read, *Catherine*, pp. 162 and 166.

⁷⁵ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 20, emphasis is Booth’s.

⁷⁶ Read, *Catherine*, pp. 166-7.

takes place at various levels in relation to society and Church. Whatever the limitations of her approach, it allows her in context to argue for an equality between men and women with respect to preaching, without reducing their distinct contributions to sameness under an 'androcentric principle'.⁷⁷ Copeland writes:

The contexts in which we find ourselves cannot be transformed in one sweeping movement...Instead our contexts represent a totality of practices with multiple fault lines where tremors and eruptions can occur. Internal relations between individuals within these formations are not predictable, but rather are open and contingent.⁷⁸

It is in respect to Booth pushing through such 'fault lines' that she acted as an 'antagonistic subject', being one 'situated both within and against the current structure'.⁷⁹

Relational Dynamic: Who?

The second variable in register through which the distinct contribution of women's voices can be heard is the 'who' of preaching. For Copeland, this is the variable where gender can have the greatest impact: 'gender, as it gives definition to who is speaking has a great deal of influence on what is heard...[introducing]... the possibility that the entire communication will be altered even when the other two variables remain constant'.⁸⁰ Walker writes about *Female Teaching*, 'The mere fact that it was written by a woman was unusual.'⁸¹ Booth wrote, 'It is pretty well-known that a *Lady* has tackled him, and there is much speculation and curiosity abroad it seems.'⁸² To put this differently, since the author of this pamphlet was a woman, this impacted the meaning making of the event in its reception. The established equilibrium of communication was changed. In the language of Copeland, such 'imbalance may be influenced by the novelty of her presence, thus vesting her words with more importance than they deserve. Or it may be dominated by disdain for her audacity, freighting her words with unfounded suspicion.'⁸³

Yet, more can be said on this topic of the 'who'. For, according to the ideas of Weeks, identity or subjectivity is something ever changing and being shaped in the creative process of doing.⁸⁴ It can thus be argued that Booth

⁷⁷ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 62.

⁷⁸ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 57.

⁷⁹ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 57.

⁸⁰ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 50.

⁸¹ Walker, *Pulling*, p. 29.

⁸² Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Walker, *Pulling*, p. 29, emphasis is Booth's.

⁸³ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 93.

⁸⁴ This is my interpretation of Weeks' argument about the 'Ontology of Labour', in *Constituting*, pp. 121-5.

not only made her arguments as a woman, but that this was an activity in and through which her own subjectivity was being ‘created’.

In writing her pamphlet, Booth clearly drew upon the various sources that constituted her knowledge and understanding.⁸⁵ This said, in the pamphlet she owned them. In a letter to her parents, on the production of the pamphlet in December 1859, she wrote, ‘There is one thing which is due to myself, I think to tell you – that whatever may be its merit it is mine own, and far more original, I believe, than most things that are published, for I could get no help from any quarter.’⁸⁶ To be sure it is the case that in *Female Teaching* ‘Catherine does *not* apply her argument to herself. She is not claiming her *own* right to preach’.⁸⁷ The same point can be made in relation to the fact that when she wrote the pamphlet she had never preached in public. Roger Green writes, ‘It is important to note that Catherine Booth had not yet entered into a public ministry, and therefore was not defending her own personal right to preach, but the principle of women preaching the Gospel.’⁸⁸ The danger in such statements, however, is that they may suggest something of a detached personal stance from the issue. Such was not the case. Booth wrote as a woman. She was a woman who already believed that in Christ there was a ‘perfect equality’ between the sexes and that this should extend to the practice of Christian ministry.⁸⁹ To be sure in *Female Teaching* she asked, ‘why a mind like Mrs. Stowe’s should shroud itself in obscurity, and hide its light, beauty, and power under a bushel’.⁹⁰ Earlier, however, in a letter to William Booth in 1855 she asked much more personally:

If indeed there is in ‘Christ Jesus neither male nor female,’ but in touching His kingdom ‘they are one,’ who shall dare thrust woman out of the Church’s operations, or presume to put *my* candle which *God* has lighted under a bushel? ⁹¹

Whatever the style of her writing, insofar as the issue of women preaching was an issue for women, it was indeed a personal issue for her. Furthermore, while in 1859 Booth may never yet have preached in public, for several years prior she had wrestled with a sense of such a calling to public ministry as something, on the one hand, contrary to her personality but, on the other, yet required in obedience if she were to achieve ‘perfect consecration’.⁹² This spiritual inner conflict may have been heightened

⁸⁵ Various authors describe her sources see for example, Read, *Catherine*, p. 15

⁸⁶ Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 244.

⁸⁷ Catherine Bramwell-Booth, *Catherine Booth: The Story of her Loves* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p. 183, emphasis is Bramwell-Booth’s.

⁸⁸ Green, ‘Settled’, p. 135.

⁸⁹ Green, ‘Settled’, pp.132-5.

⁹⁰ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 4.

⁹¹ Catherine Booth, Letter to William Booth dated 9 April 1855, cited in Green, ‘Settled’, p. 135, emphasis is Booth’s.

⁹² Read is particularly helpful in highlighting this internal spiritual struggle. Read, *Catherine*, pp. 12, 16, 54, and 75.

further by the demands for her to find a means of bringing material support to the family, possible through public lectures if not, indeed, through preaching.⁹³ Perhaps it is the deeply personal nature of the issue which explains why she was so ‘enraged’ by Rees and his arguments.⁹⁴ In a letter to her mother she wondered why the women in his congregation ‘could sit and hear such self-depreciatory rubbish’.⁹⁵ She said, ‘I am determined that fellow shall not go unthrashed’.⁹⁶ She writes further, ‘I should like to have given him more *pepper* but being a Lady I felt I must preserve a becoming dignity!’.⁹⁷

When Rees simultaneously attacked a woman’s right to teach and the revivalistic holiness movement, his target was Phoebe Palmer. But for another woman, Catherine Booth, these issues were at the centre of her emerging identity. In turn, being required to make such a response may have contributed to the resolution of her struggles. Booth-Tucker writes, ‘What the persuasions of her husband and friends had failed to induce her to undertake, the taunts and denunciations of opposition were to be largely instrumental in forcing upon her.’⁹⁸ On Whit Sunday 1860, Catherine in the morning confessed to William’s Gateshead congregation of her disobedience in this matter of not preaching. In the evening she preached her first public sermon. This removed the barrier to her ‘entering into the experience of holiness’.⁹⁹ It also provided a means for her to provide for her family and later the ministry as her own career developed.¹⁰⁰ The ‘who’, therefore, that produced *Female Teaching* was a subject ‘becoming’ in the production of a pamphlet which was an act not simply of thinking but of doing ‘in word and deed’.¹⁰¹

Mode: How?

The ‘mode’ or ‘how’ of register is the third variable which allows the voices of women to be heard, because of the impact that gender has upon it. Three aspects of mode will be considered.

⁹³ Walker is particularly helpful in highlighting the material concerns related to Booth’s life and the opportunities that lecturing and preaching could provide to her for employment, opportunities of which she was quite aware both before and after 1859, as is demonstrated in her correspondence. Walker, *Pulling*, pp. 31-4.

⁹⁴ Walker, *Pulling*, p. 26.

⁹⁵ Catherine Booth, Letter to her mother, 1859, cited in Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 243.

⁹⁶ Catherine Booth, Letter to her mother, 1859, cited in Walker, *Pulling*, p. 26.

⁹⁷ Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Walker, *Pulling*, p. 29, emphasis is Booth’s.

⁹⁸ Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 242.

⁹⁹ Read, *Catherine*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰ Green, ‘Settled’, p. 138.

¹⁰¹ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 137.

The first that requires at least to be noted is the nature of medium used. *Female Teaching* was written and published as a pamphlet.¹⁰² In nineteenth century England pamphlets were published on a large number of issues, including the political and the religious. They were intended as a means of mass communication. The third edition of *Female Ministry* was designed in such a way as to allow a cheaper publication with the purpose of reaching a wider audience.¹⁰³ As with Booth's subject matter the topics covered were often contentious.¹⁰⁴ 'One of the reasons Booth wrote *Female Teaching* in 1859 was that she was not satisfied with the answers that others had written to Mr Rees.¹⁰⁵ There is a real sense, therefore, in which Booth's communication in the pamphlet deliberately involved her in entering a public controversy. In adopting this particular approach she joined the company of other women who engaged in literary communication as a way of making their voices heard, including on gender and religious issues.¹⁰⁶ To pursue this literary strategy, therefore, involved Booth in engaging in another practice which had its own tensive nature with respect to the perceived private and domestic role that women were expected to inhabit, not least in religious circles.¹⁰⁷

The second area of mode which can be discussed is Booth's rhetorical approach in the pamphlet. Her intention was 'to deal exclusively with the principles involved in the controversy'.¹⁰⁸ Her goal was 'to establish, what we sincerely believe, that woman has a **right** to teach'.¹⁰⁹ Much of the article, therefore, is a counter-argument intended to 'prove' that this is the case, contrary to the proofs of Mr Rees. Booth draws upon a wide range of familiar rhetorical devices in her argument. These include questions, making concessions, quoting authorities, critiquing the logic, and, indeed, the credibility of Rees and his arguments. This and the fact that she is responding to Rees gives the pamphlet a dialogical style.¹¹⁰

¹⁰² It is interesting to note that Booth did not enjoy the experience of working with the publishers. Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Bramwell-Booth, *Catherine*, p. 182.

¹⁰³ Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ 'Pamphlets are especially useful, since in the nineteenth century they played an important role as vehicles of controversy which in our day they have largely lost', <<https://www.newberry.org/british-pamphlets-19th-century-aydelotte-wo-nineteenth-century-british-pamphlets-newberry-librarythe>> [accessed 01 June 2017]

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Booth, Letter to her mother, 1859, Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900*, ed. by Joanne Shattook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Rebecca Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 3-18.

¹⁰⁸ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 30, emphasis is Booth's.

¹¹⁰ In a lecture delivered in 1884 the reporter records audience responses to Booth's talk including 'cheers', 'applause' and 'laughter' and her style lends itself to such responses. Catherine Booth, 'The Iniquity of State Regulated Vice. A Speech Delivered at Exeter Hall, London, on February 6th, 1884' (London: Dyer Brothers, 1884), available here <<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7082.xml&doc.view=print>> [accessed 05 June 2017]

More significant for this article, Booth also evidences the use of irony which is one of the two ‘selective practices’ identified by Weeks associated with constructing feminist subjectivity.¹¹¹ Irony as a practice is a way of ‘problematizing’ ‘beliefs and commitments’ and associated with a ‘certain kind of laughter’.¹¹² Booth certainly makes use of irony as a rhetorical strategy, not least in her opposition to Rees and his arguments. One example is where she exposes the irony of Rees’ support of male preachers over and against women in relation to his dismissal of the example of Mary as a public preacher. Booth responds by asking him if he can explain, then, why the Lord may have so honoured a woman with the task of announcing the resurrection rather than a man, and then herself responds:

One reason might be that the male disciples were all missing at the time. One was probably contemplating suicide, goaded to madness by a conscience reeking with the blood of his betrayed and crucified Master; another was occupied in reflecting on certain conversations with a servant maid; and the rest were trembling in various holes and corners, having all forsaken their Master, and fled.¹¹³

Again one gets the sense that she would expect some laughter when she writes about Rees’ argument about women being the way in which evil entered the world. For, in preparing to address him, she writes one thing while clearly meaning the opposite:

Our author now seems to gather up his strength for a final deliverance on this subject. And certainly, the astounding information he conveys (page 14), as well as the remarkable confirmation he supplies, is worthy of the effort it appears to cost him.¹¹⁴

In another place she refers to Rees and his supporters as ‘the monarchs of the desk’ even as she disputes their opinions.¹¹⁵ Weeks, however, develops the theme of irony in particular with respect to ‘self-laughter’ as a force of disruptive ‘negation’ and ‘resistance’ where a person does not take themselves too seriously but in so doing subverts the idea of all controlling categories.¹¹⁶ It may be anachronistic to look for this in Booth. It is also difficult to describe with certainty, because the appreciation of irony depends upon the standpoint of the listener. Be this as it may, there are places where it is possible that the irony would have invited women to reflect upon the nature of their roles. One example is where Booth seeks to show the absurdity of Rees’ arguments concerning the nature of women by presenting him as meaning ‘that so soon as she presumes to step on the platform or into the pulpit, she loses the delicacy and grace of the female character—in fact,

¹¹¹ I will discuss self-valorization below.

¹¹² Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 137.

¹¹³ Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁴ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 21.

¹¹⁵ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 22, footnote.

¹¹⁶ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 138.

ceases to be a woman'.¹¹⁷ Another is where she refers to the fact that Rees admits that it is true that many women are better than some men and she responds:

Truly, the ladies of Mr. Rees's congregation must have felt themselves highly complimented by this very gracious admission, which simply amounts to saying that a refined, intelligent, and Christian female is, after all, superior to a coarse, besotted, ignorant vagabond of the opposite sex, notwithstanding that she is a woman!¹¹⁸

The laughter that such may have encouraged in female listeners who could identify with the roles being presented would serve to subvert those roles and, at least implicitly, fixed gender classifications.

The third area in which the question of mode is significant refers to the sort of female preaching Booth was advocating. This relates to Weeks' second practice of 'self-valorization'.¹¹⁹ If irony is the negative practice of the antagonistic subject, then self-valorization is the positive, 'joyful' practice.¹²⁰ Self-valorization refers to the 'affirmation' and creation of new value giving practices.¹²¹ In *Female Teaching*, Booth clearly advocates the practice of female preaching where women preach as women in a way that maximises the strength of their femininity, as is evident in the quotation that opens this article. In *Female Ministry* she associates 'tenderness' with 'womanly' and highlights the 'modesty and gentleness' and the 'devotedness, purity, and sweetness' of the lives of female preachers.¹²² A danger in emphasising such qualities is that it can reinforce gender stereotypes when and where women are relegated to traditional 'helping' roles.¹²³ Yet Booth is clearly pushing beyond these roles even as she continues to accept some such stereotypes. In *Female Ministry* she writes that it is good that woman as 'benefiting her race' find opportunities in private such as visiting the sick, but that this should not prevent her from the honour of preaching the Gospel.¹²⁴ This is the case even if it is a 'novelty'.¹²⁵

Booth's actual instructions on the practice of female preaching are very limited, although she did couple the stress on the female character with the need for women preachers to be 'becomingly attired'.¹²⁶ Given the deeply personal nature of this pamphlet, as argued above, Booth's own practice may give us some indication of what anticipated practices undergirded her

¹¹⁷ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 137.

¹²⁰ Weeks, *Constituting*, pp. 137, 145.

¹²¹ Weeks, *Constituting*, pp. 146-7.

¹²² Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 4.

¹²³ Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 63.

¹²⁴ Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 14.

¹²⁵ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 3.

description of a feminine style. Negatively she resisted a spontaneous 'ranting' style which goes without 'order and arrangement', as if to show that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.¹²⁷ Positively, she promoted a modest, respectable, logical approach but one which appealed to the heart. One report of her preaching in 1860 described it as 'chaste and fervid eloquence'.¹²⁸ A later report in the *Gospel Guide* in 1865 describes her dressed in a black bonnet, jacket, and dress, preaching quietly but with powerful arguments, enlisting sympathy and attention with a 'calm, precise, and clear' delivery which never became tedious.¹²⁹ In some senses her personal practice appears quite limiting of the mode. Anderson, however, argues that in context this sort of style which emphasised feminine ideas of 'sweetness and tenderness' with a 'tender love for souls' made a lady preacher 'an almost irresistible mouthpiece for an appeal to the hearts of audiences composed of "respectable working men" or the "better orders"'.¹³⁰ Such gatherings were indeed Booth's main audiences.¹³¹

Conclusion

The antagonistic subject is a 'being becoming' in the process of denying and affirming roles which are simultaneously accepted and projected upon her. The above analysis of the arguments of Catherine Booth in *Female Teaching*, in relation to the analytical concept of register, demonstrates the way in which through the 'what and where', the 'who' and the 'how' her views on gender were expressed and being developed by her female voice. She stressed the significance of a woman's right to preach as a woman, expressed an approach to women in ministry which would be implemented in the Salvation Army, and was herself changed in the process. In *Female Teaching* Booth writes:

The day is but just dawning with respect to this subject; thank God, however, it is dawning. Women are thinking, studying, writing, aye and speaking too, on all the leading topics of the day. They are making themselves heard in drawing-room soirées, social science congresses, confidential state counsels, and through the press, to an extent little dreamed of by a gentleman of such antiquated notions as Mr. Rees.¹³²

Here Booth suggests, to draw again on the language of Weeks, that women were acting as 'multiple' subjects.¹³³ Such 'collectives', Weeks argues, are

¹²⁷ Walker, 'Gender', p. 179 citing Catherine Booth, unpublished Letter to William Booth, 3 September 1860 and to be found in the British Library.

¹²⁸ Wesleyan Times, 20 August 1860, cited in Walker, *Pulling*, p. 34.

¹²⁹ Wesleyan Times, 'Mrs Booth's Revival Services in London', cited in Read, *Catherine*, p. 19.

¹³⁰ Anderson, 'Women', p. 472.

¹³¹ Anderson, 'Women', p. 473.

¹³² Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 24, emphasis is Booth's.

¹³³ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 136.

necessary for bringing change.¹³⁴ From this perspective Booth's *Female Teaching* was one contributory voice to these 'multiple, subversive' antagonistic voices for change.¹³⁵

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¹³⁴ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 136.

¹³⁵ Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 136.

Gender Relations in the New Testament: A Feminist Anabaptist Reading

Fran Porter

Against centuries of framing gender relations on the basis of so-called biblical ‘hard passages’, I offer an expansive three-fold way of reading the New Testament that is both feminist and Anabaptist. Using both hermeneutics of suspicion about power and Christocentric biblical interpretation, I seek to counter women’s inequality, disadvantage, and subordination. I argue for: taking a broad look at the text when thinking about gender relations to uncover the story of gender in unlikely places that I argue should become the most likely places; paying attention to the diversity of early Christian location, experience, and expression in the context of the politics and society of the ancient world; and within this framework revisiting specific texts predominantly associated with a gender hierarchy to encounter exhortations of moral agency, behaviour, and activity. This approach maintains vigilance about gender power relations, while simultaneously providing a critique of gendered approaches to scripture.

Key Words

Anabaptist; Feminist; Gender; Hermeneutics

Introduction

In this article,¹ I offer a response that is both feminist and Anabaptist to the overwhelming tendency to frame our understanding of gender relations based on a select number of verses in the New Testament, sometimes referred to as the ‘hard passages’.² My response is feminist in that it seeks to counter women’s inequality, disadvantage, and subordination within existing gender power relations. It is Anabaptist in that it uses two key Anabaptist hermeneutics: suspicion about power and Christocentric biblical interpretation. My contention is that a narrowly focused biblical framework gives us an impoverished reading of gender – even when oft-cited passages are interpreted and contextualised to be fully inclusive of women’s participation and place alongside men. I propose, instead, an expansive way

¹ Material in this article is drawn from Fran Porter, *Women and Men after Christendom: The Dis-Ordering of Gender Relationships* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015). My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on a previous version.

² I Corinthians 11. 2-16; 14. 34-5; Ephesians 5. 22-33; Colossians 3. 18-19; I Timothy 2. 8-15; I Peter 3. 1-7.

of reading that enlarges the scope of how and where we look for the story of gender in the New Testament. This way of reading, I argue, maintains vigilance about gender power relations, while at the same time providing a critique of our current gendered approaches to scripture. Hence, it is alert to the reality of gender relations, making gender a core category of analysis, while at the same time refusing to gender scripture itself, either as a text or in interpretation of the text.³

Expansive New Testament Reading

In the UK context where I am based, throughout my lifetime, the lives of women within the Christian church have been shaped by a patriarchal inheritance that has subordinated women to men.⁴ Building on centuries of androcentric authoritative pronouncements on theology and scripture, the last fifty years have seen continuing debates concerning women's nature, agency, and actions. These debates remain current. In the recent absorption of Anglican energies regarding admitting women to the Church of England episcopate (voted for in July 2014 after being defeated in a similar vote in November 2012), the interpretation of select biblical verses featured. This echoes the English Baptist context, where those 'who adopt a hermeneutic that readily reads supposed Pauline prohibitions against the ministry of women and privileges them ahead of other texts, claim legitimacy for a refusal to accept the Baptist Union's national policy'.⁵ Across traditions, those who support non-hierarchical gender relations often have to argue for, rather than take for granted, wider or alternative hermeneutical approaches that support their stance. As Susanne Scholz argues of North America, the context of 'the Christian Right's conservative sociopolitical and theological discourse' means that 'feminist exegetes continue to combat the most basic and persistent androcentric views on women, gender and the Bible that they

³ To 'gender' scripture is to associate particular passages as pertaining only or mainly to women or men, or to impose our gendered understanding on any part of the text.

⁴ This includes the notion of complementarity, which despite its 'softened' language maintains a gender hierarchy, as is demonstrated in debates about whether justifying women's subordination within gender complementarianism involves a theology of subordination within the Trinity. See summary of the discussion in Mark Woods, 'Complementarianism and the Trinity: Is Wayne Grudem a Dangerous Heretic?' in *Christian Today*, 28 June 2016 <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/complementarianism_and.the.trinity.is.wayne.grudem.a.dangerous.heretic/89445.htm> [accessed 14 November 2016]

⁵ Paul Goodliff, 'Women's Ministry. An Exploration at a Historic Moment', *Baptist Quarterly*, 45 no. 8 (2014), 485-99 (p. 491). While Baptist churches in England and Wales each had their first female pastors in 1922 and 1923 respectively, the first woman to be inducted as pastor in a Scottish Baptist church was in 2009. See Faith Bowers, 'Liberating Women for Baptist Ministry', *Baptist Quarterly*, 45 no. 8 (2014), 456-64 and Michael J. Collis, 'Female Baptist Preachers and Ministers in Wales', *Baptist Quarterly*, 45 no. 8 (2014), 465-84. There have been no women pastors among member churches of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland who have 'The creation of humanity, male and female, in the image of God, equal in value and complementary in role' as part of their doctrinal statement. <<https://www.baptistsinireland.org/about/what-we-believe/>> [accessed 16 January 2017]

have been deconstructing for more than forty years'.⁶ Against this background that has determined the trajectory of so much of our biblical thinking about gender relations, I argue for an expanded and expansive reading of the New Testament, for which I draw on both feminist and Anabaptist resources.

Both feminists and Anabaptists approach reading the Bible with hermeneutics of suspicion, but do so from different starting points. The Anabaptists were part of the sixteenth century renewal movement of the radical reformation in Europe and were named 're-baptisers' by the established churches because of their practice of baptising believers and hence not infants.⁷ This practice was part of their stance of separating church and state, of breaking the compulsory identification of citizens with a Christian empire, rather seeing Christian profession as an active choice and not a default of birth. And they believed in and practised a more congregational style of being church in which both women and men participated, rejecting ecclesial authorities, with many of their followers from among the poorer classes. They were persecuted by Catholic and Reformed state churches alike, their rebaptism viewed as 'treasonous as well as unorthodox'⁸ and punishable by death. Anabaptists discerned in the gospels the call to all Christians of an ethical discipleship, which often ran counter to church teaching and put them at odds with state power. Formed resisting Christendom's appropriation of biblical interpretation to serve the politics of empire, Anabaptists practised what in today's parlance can be called hermeneutics of suspicion.

Feminist hermeneutics of suspicion (a term advanced by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza)⁹ emerged from critique of the androcentrism and patriarchalism not only of biblical interpretation but also of the text itself. Within the Scriptures there are alternative witnesses to the personhood of women than that portrayed by powerful males in the church using the text to subordinate women. Engaging with the text out of women's lived experiences, and making visible that which is either ignored or implicit on its pages, is a means of uncovering resources in the text itself that are liberating and life-giving for women. However, such counter-patriarchal interpretations cannot erode the difficulties of a text produced in and out of male-oriented language, culture, and power, with the marginalisation of

⁶ Susanne Scholz, "'Stirring up Vital Energies": Feminist Biblical Studies in North America (1980s–2000s)', in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), pp. 53–70 (p. 66).

⁷ For an account of Anabaptist origins see Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Scottsdale, PA/Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2010), chapter 7.

⁸ Murray, p. 140.

⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

female presence and activity in the Bible embodied in women's sociopolitical and ecclesiological marginalisation. Responses to this by those who continue to wrestle with rather than reject the text vary, from those focusing only on those texts that affirm the full humanity of women and regarding others as non-redemptive¹⁰ to those who engage with those texts 'of terror with women as victims', knowing that such encounters will be wounding.¹¹

While Anabaptist and feminist hermeneutics may vary between and within themselves, there is a coalescence in their suspicion about power. To read the Bible with hermeneutics of suspicion means coming to the text alert to the way in which it has been interpreted down the centuries from the point of view of those who have been in positions of power (and, indeed, the extent to which the text itself reflects the voices of the powerful). Those people at the top of various hierarchies of power have determined how the text has been understood and applied; they have been the ones to tell those in subordinate positions what the text means. Texts do indeed 'live by how they are used and abused, by who is reading them, from what social location and to what end'.¹²

In terms of gender relations, hermeneutics of suspicion mean coming to the text aware that it has been men, often (if not exclusively) elite, male clergy separated from women, who have interpreted the Bible and told women who to be, what to do and, just as frequently, what not to do. From a standpoint of male privilege which has viewed women sometimes as deficient, sometimes as dangerous, but nearly always designated as subordinate, men have told women how they should think, feel, and act, justifying this on the basis of biblical teaching that is highly selective. The so-called 'hard passages' of the New Testament are taken to encapsulate the way women and men are to be and behave specifically as female and male persons and in relation to one another. The dominant way of understanding these texts has always had something to say about men as well as women, but it has been women who have been constrained by them the most. These verses are treated as the first and the final words on women's place within proper gender order.

In the task of reading differently – of being alert to the gender power relations embedded in texts and in interpretations – the Anabaptist consistent emphasis on Christocentric interpretation has much to offer. Such Jesus-centred interpretation

¹⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1983).

¹¹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (London: SCM, 1984), pp. 1, 4-5.

¹² Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Jesus and the Subversion of Violence: Wrestling with the New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK, 2011), p. 107.

...means that the Bible, as a record of what God has said and done in many generations, must be viewed through the prism of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament points forward to him; the New Testament points back to him.¹³

The life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus (and not just the latter two) become not only core to understanding the Bible,¹⁴ but also essential for contemporary Christian praxis. Christocentric hermeneutics do not remove the need also for hermeneutics of suspicion, feminist or otherwise, for the gospels have been and still can be used to perpetuate ideologies and practices of relations of dominance/subordination and, indeed, are not without difficulties within the texts themselves. To focus on Jesus, however, serves as a crucial counter to the prevalent narrow focus on a few verses. If we engage the gospels as accounts of the ministry and mission of Jesus on their own terms rather than filtered through the so-called 'hard passages' of the epistles, we may have different encounters with the text as women and men.

In the light of the contracted use of the New Testament when thinking of gender relations, I suggest three ways of reading the text that are helpful to combine: reading with a wide-angle lens; a panoramic view; and the close-up reading of a telephoto lens. These metaphors are simply a tool to make us aware of what we have been doing and what we might do differently. So much energy has gone into defending stances on gender relations based on an exceedingly narrow focus, which I contend has meant a skewed and impoverished vision. I propose there is so much more to see if we expand the lenses we use. Here I focus more on the first of these because I believe it involves re-orienting how we approach the New Testament for the story of gender.

Reading with a Wide-Angle Lens

The first way of reading, with a wide-angle lens, involves taking a broad look at the text when thinking about gender relations. Rather than seeing social relations between women and men expounded only in a few verses, this approach engages with the whole of the text. This is not just about recovering stories of women that are either obvious or more hidden in the text, as valuable as this is.¹⁵ It also is about uncovering the story of gender in unlikely

¹³ Murray, p. 68.

¹⁴ This does not mean that the Old Testament should not be explored as Jewish Scriptures, understanding their import for ancient and inter-testamental Israel; such scholarship is necessary for Christian understanding.

¹⁵ Examples abound, such as: Megan McKenna, *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1994); Anne Thurston, *Because of her Testimony: The Word in Female Experience* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995); Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women:*

places. As an example, I look at what we can learn about gender relations from what it meant to follow Jesus in the Greco-Roman world where the social, political, and religious were interwoven into a cosmic order. Discipleship in this context challenged various hierarchies that underpinned the fabric of society, including that of gender. To grasp how disruptive to that social fabric following Jesus could be, I first outline something of the cultural context of the first Christians. I then draw on the gospel texts to illuminate what was so disturbing to the social order. I finish this section by considering the implications for how we read the gospels as women and men.

The social framework of the Greco-Roman world was made up of the *familia* and the *domus*. The *familia* was a household or estate, ‘a residential unit for production, consumption and service’,¹⁶ that encompassed not only people – including slaves and their children, and ex-slaves who still owed service, blood relatives, and adopted children – but also property, land, and animals. All these people and things (with some exceptions) were legally under the sovereign control of the *paterfamilias*, the male head of the household.¹⁷ The strictly understood *familia* norms were related to the *domus* – the kinship networks of male lineage of blood descendants through the generations. These two frameworks worked together in ‘maintaining and reproducing the male lineage with all its rights of power and property’.¹⁸ Hence, in the most common form of marriage, a wife remained under the authority of her own father rather than that of her husband, which ensured that her dowry property remained under the domain of her father on divorce. The importance of generational family continuity is reflected in the use of adoption to legally secure the transmission of family property and name often in the absence of, and sometimes after disinheriting, a biological heir. This latter, which occurred when a daughter or son had brought shame or disrepute to the family, required public justification, ‘demonstrating the extent to which family life was not a private matter as it is in our time’.¹⁹ The adoption process, which required seven witnesses, brought the adopted son

Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (London: T&T Clark, 2002); and Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (London: SPCK, 2008).

¹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 13.

¹⁷ Exceptions were offspring (both females and males) who had been emancipated by their father during his lifetime and hence had control over their own property, with daughters subject to certain legal restrictions on their autonomy through male guardianship. Exemptions from male guardianship for emancipated women were introduced by Augustus (through *lex Julia* around 18 BC and *lex Papia Poppaea* in AD 9) if a woman had three (for a free-born Roman citizen) or four (for a freedwoman) live births, defined as a child surviving to the naming ceremony (eight days after birth for a girl and nine days for a boy). Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), pp. 42-3, 108, 124-5.

¹⁸ Ruether, *Christianity*, p. 14.

¹⁹ Deirdre Good, *Jesus' Family Values* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), p. 36.

onto the same legal standing as any biological child.²⁰ This is the context on which Paul draws to illustrate how believers, through adoption, become children, and hence heirs, of God.²¹

A similar patriarchal pattern was reflected in Jewish households. Inheritance was passed to sons and daughters (though not necessarily equally to all children), marriages involved dowries, and fathers might gift their daughters other wealth so as to keep it within their own family rather than that of the husband, whether or not divorce ensued. While only Roman citizens could enter into marriages covered by Roman law (making them licit marriages), the same cultural expectations about family obligations and honour infused many informal (illicit) marriages in the Greco-Roman world.

Slavery was widespread; Greeks and Jews were both slave owners and slaves. Even relatively poor families might own one or two slaves. Fortunes among slaves could vary, but unless a slave gained their freedom, they were their owner's property and without legal status. This is

a world in which *nothing* exists that corresponds to our idea of universal human rights. There was no such thing as general equality before the law. Being a [Roman] citizen guaranteed you many things; being a ... migrant or a low-paid worker gave you a few limited privileges before the law; and being a slave gave you none at all.²²

The dominant cultural value of this hierarchical and gendered patriarchal framework of the 'kin-household'²³ was so pervasive that Jesus used its familiarity easily in his parables.²⁴ There are stories involving masters, sons, slaves, and hired workers in settings of household economies and kin relationships. The opportunities and misfortunes of the characters in these stories were well known in actual lives; to be sold on, along with your wife, children, and possessions, at the decision of a master was unremarkable.²⁵ However, as with so much of Jesus' teaching, the illustrations he used sometimes were effective because of the contrast to prevailing practice, as in the extraordinary notion that a master, on coming home and finding his slaves alert and waiting for him, would have them sit down and be served by him.²⁶

²⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), p. 197.

²¹ Romans 8. 12-17; Galatians 4. 4-7.

²² Rowan Williams, *Meeting God in Paul* (London: SPCK, 2015), p 5.

²³ Ruether, *Christianity*, p. 19.

²⁴ Matthew 18. 23-35 (parable of the unforgiving servant); Matthew 20. 1-16 (parable of the landowner and hired labourers); Matthew 21. 33-41 (parable of the landowner and tenants); Matthew 24. 45-51 and Luke 12.41-8 (parable of the faithful and unfaithful slaves); Matthew 25. 14-30 (parable of the talents); Luke 14. 15-24 (parable of the great dinner); Luke 15. 11-31 (parable of the father and his two sons); Luke 16. 1-13 (parable of the dishonest manager).

²⁵ Matthew 18. 25.

²⁶ Luke 12. 35-8.

The kin-household framework, as with Jewish households, was the primary place of religious identity and observance for, in Greco-Roman society, religious identity was not primarily individual or personal but familial. To be a member of a particular kin-household was to have the religious identity of the *paterfamilias* and religion was integral to the welfare of both kin-households and the state, the patriarchal family being a paradigm for the state. The proper order of the household was reflected in the proper order of the state, and both were cemented in a religiously ordered world.

Within a generation of Jesus' death,²⁷ to be a Christian (whether Jewish or Gentile) was to be part of a proscribed *superstitio*, that is, an illicit religion, 'denoting an intolerable deviation from society's norms of behavior'.²⁸ Some 150 years later, Christians were still accused of being 'a gang ... of discredited and proscribed desperadoes who band themselves against the gods'²⁹ with all the implications about disloyalty to household and state. The reasons behind such censure are found in the gospel itself, which threatened the stability of family networks and hence the social order.

Disruption and challenge to the existing world order are evident throughout the pages of the gospels. Jesus preached good news of God's liberation in people's lives whereby they are brought into a new community – a kin network that did not depend on blood lines, national identity, or patriarchal norms. Jesus identifies his followers as his family members (Mark 3. 35) in a new community that is for everyone, with Jesus commending the faith of a Gentile centurion (Luke 7. 9), a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15. 28), and a Samaritan man (Luke 17. 19). The message of the Lord's favour that releases the captives and frees the oppressed, announced in Galilee (Luke 4. 18), is to be proclaimed to all the nations (Luke 24. 47). It is for women as well as men (Luke 10. 42), for children as well as adults (Mark 10. 14). Further, it includes those of low status and without rights on the same basis and even on occasions instead of those of wealth and status (Luke 14. 21). This good news radically transforms the behaviour of the powerful (Mark 10. 42–5). In being deeply subversive of the prevailing order it may indeed be termed 'a cosmic sedition'.³⁰ Where there was household conversion the entire household followed the decision of the head of the household, although this could threaten the larger kin network.³¹ But for individuals within households to move away from the religion of the house was to disrupt the conditions for the wellbeing of family and state and

²⁷ At least from the sixties, Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), p. 13.

²⁸ Kreider, p. 39.

²⁹ The view of the pagan Caecilius recorded by Minucius Felix in Octavius, cited in Kreider, p. 11.

³⁰ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (London: Yale, 2009), p. 124.

³¹ Acts 16. 15, 30–34; 18. 8.

threaten the preservation of national identity. This explains the conflict that Jesus talked about for his followers between family members: ‘For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household’ (Matthew 10. 35ff).

It is in this new community of belonging that the significance of the metaphor of God as father belongs. In the gospels, Jesus presents God as ‘father’ – his own and of those who follow him. Much contemporary reflection on the significance of this metaphor rests, both implicitly and explicitly, on father as *a male and not a female* depiction of God and what that means for our ideas about God and about human relationships.³² In this approach, gender identity is the lens through which God as father is understood. There is, however, another way of reading the depiction of God as father, that it is a metaphor used not for its value as male as opposed to female imagery, but as a juxtaposition to ‘king’ or ‘master’. What Jesus is conveying is that God is not like an earthly king who rules over subservient subjects but a father who cares for his children. The idea of God as father draws on a familial term of belonging rather than a term of allegiance to a master or king. It is relationship to this father that makes one a member of God’s family; it is not dependent on biological lineages or existing religious loyalties (whether Jewish or pagan).

The idea of belonging based on relationship to the father of the family would have made sense against the background of both Greco-Roman and Jewish households. But in contrast to the power of the *paterfamilias*, there are no slaves – people are not owned like property – there are only brothers and sisters and friends (John 15. 12–15). There is no competition for status and power, for self-promotion, or jostling for positions of greatness (Mark 9. 33–7). Nor is the accumulation of wealth a priority, indeed it is a hindrance (Luke 12. 15; 18. 24–5). And existing family loyalties are superseded (Matthew 8. 21–2). This is a picture of God that undermines, challenges, and opposes the hierarchy of patriarchal families – of whatever kind.

What our own cultural discourse about family can prevent us from seeing is that God as father is not used as ‘a legitimization for existing patriarchal structures in society or church but as a critical subversion of all

³² Whether this is an approach that has biblical warrant is another matter. A good discussion is provided by Marianne Meye Thompson who states, ‘Strikingly, in all the Bible’s presentation of God in the “masculine” imagery of Father, God is never held up as the model for “masculinity” for a father or a male over against a mother or a woman. Rather, the way in which God is understood to act obligates human beings in their relationships to each other. The implications of God’s Fatherhood are not drawn out for fathers, but for those who wish to live together in the community which God calls into being.’ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 182.

structures of domination'.³³ God's new family framework was highly subversive of the existing social and indeed political order. According to Celsus, a pagan critic of Christianity, writing toward the end of the second century, Christians of lower classes were guilty of persuading children and women to defy the authority of fathers and tutors and to become Christians. These lowly Christians were 'wool-workers, cobblers, and laundry workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels' who 'get hold of children . . . and some stupid women' and make 'some astounding statements as, for example, they must not pay any attention to their father and schoolteachers, but must obey them; they say that these talk nonsense and have no understanding . . . they alone know the right way to live'.³⁴ What this unsympathetic and, indeed, hostile partial portrait shows is that, for Celsus, Christianity – a religion of women, children, and slaves – threatened the cohesion of the *familia*, and therefore the wellbeing of the empire.

It is therefore in the good news of 'come, follow me'³⁵ that we find the story of gender. While I have described this as an example of looking in unlikely places, we need a hermeneutical re-orientation to see this as the most likely place for how we understand gender relations. To find the story of gender in (what are currently considered) unlikely places or to ask unfamiliar questions of a familiar text means attempting to come to the New Testament without the shadow of centuries of hierarchical interpretations about gender. Part of that means learning to read women into the text – often they are implicitly there but the need is to make them visible. The call to follow Jesus is given to women as it is to men. It is important for women and for men to see women in the gospel accounts. Implicitly, in the same way that the generic human being is imagined as male (as, for example, in the 'man in the street'),³⁶ much Bible reading has made discipleship normatively male. Compounded by the conflation of the twelve (who were male) with all of Jesus' followers (who were many and both female and male), in popular imagination the generic Christian disciple is male. In addition, concentration on select passages in the epistles that appear to focus specifically on the behaviour of Christian women moves the emphasis away from the gospels or, at least, qualifies and defines the outworking of the gospel for women.

Reading with a wide-angle lens means that rather than seeing women defined, 'explained', and shaped by those texts that are said to provide specific instructions about what women cannot do, should do, and should be (they cannot teach men; they should not speak in front of men; they must ask

³³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM, 1983), p. 151.

³⁴ Cited in Ruether, *Christianity*, p. 33. Celsus' words are preserved in Origen's written response, entitled *Contra Celsum*, to Celsus's criticisms.

³⁵ Matthew 19. 21.

³⁶ See Porter, *Women and Men*, pp. 66-7, 75-6, 85.

their husbands at home; they should be subordinate to men; they must marry, bear children, and raise their families; they must obey husbands; they must be silent; they must be of a gentle disposition; they must be modest), women are seen by themselves and by men as engaging with the whole of the text.

For example, what does it mean to be peacemakers – as women, as men, as women and men together? What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness – as women, as men, as women and men together? When Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love God and the second to love our neighbour as ourselves, how do we respond? How do we love our enemies? How do we ‘not worry’, guard ourselves against ‘all kinds of greed’, and store up treasure in heaven?³⁷ Of course, these verses are worked out in our contemporary gendered context, and as such may look different for women and men in different situations. But that in and of itself is not determined by the gospel accounts. So while there may be gendered expressions of our discipleship, the gospel may also challenge our contemporary practice. The import of this can be seen in terms of the demanding ethic to deny the self.³⁸ If gender relations are structured in a God–man–woman hierarchy, then Jesus’ words about his followers’ self-denial in which they ‘take up their cross’ (Mark 8. 34) have different consequences for women than for men. In a gendered framework that sees service of others as women’s particular vocation, these words have done nothing to challenge unequal social relations between women and men and, at worst, have been – and still are – used to keep women in abusive situations. In the light of this legacy, what does it mean today (in terms of both discipleship and witness) for women and for men to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus?³⁹ What should it *not* mean? And how might we change our structures and culture so that discipleship for women and for men does not involve abuses of power? A broad reading of the scriptures that is Jesus-centred allows the text to interrogate our own gender practice.

A Panoramic View

The second expansive way of reading the New Testament is taking a panoramic view. This concerns looking at the early church as we meet it in the New Testament – in the book of Acts that narrates the story of the spread of the gospel and in various letters to localised communities of believers and some individuals. This panoramic view will also encompass the gospels and the book of Revelation, as they were all produced in the context of the first

³⁷ Matthew 5. 9, 6; 22. 37-40; 5. 44; Luke 12. 13-34.

³⁸ See Fran Porter, *It will not be taken away from her: A Feminist Engagement with Women’s Christian Experience* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), pp. 60-64.

³⁹ Mark 8. 34.

Christian communities. A panoramic view, therefore, bears in mind the diversity of early Christian location, experience, and expression in the context of the politics and society of the ancient world. Whereas wide-angle reading expands where we look, and at what, for the story of gender, panoramic reading bears in mind the sweep of New Testament evidence that presents a diverse picture of early Christian life.

A panoramic reading of the New Testament sees growth, change (the situations are dynamic, not static), and indeed conflict reflected in the story of the early church, which was not immune from the realities of wrestling with what it meant to follow Jesus. The book of Acts recounts in detail (twice – once in telling the story of Peter’s experience and a second time when Peter explains what happened to him and to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem when they protested about his behaviour)⁴⁰ how Peter came to the realisation that the good news was for Gentiles as much as it was for Jews. We know that some prominent Jewish Christians struggled with living out this realisation.⁴¹ We know that there was a further difference of opinion among early leaders that led to Paul and Barnabas working separately rather than continuing together.⁴² We also know that this particular difference, over the trustworthiness of Mark in the eyes of Paul, was not the end of the story and Mark subsequently joins Paul’s company again and is commended by him.⁴³ We know that there were different leaders who inspired loyalty from different groups of believers.⁴⁴ We know of broken relationships among early believers.⁴⁵ We know that there were false teachers influencing Christians.⁴⁶ We know that some early Christians faced demanding changes in their behaviour.⁴⁷ And we know that early Christian communities faced ongoing pressures and challenges in their discipleship and life together.⁴⁸

A panoramic view guards against a false or neat conformity imposed on Christians in the first churches and presents us rather with living, and even ‘untidy’, bodies of believers. In the same way that we have four gospels providing, initially for different communities of believers, some diversity of expression of the mission and ministry of Jesus, so too the other writings of the New Testament open windows on a variety of Christian churches. The New Testament epistles contain many voices as part of a conversation about

⁴⁰ Acts 10. 1 - 11. 18.

⁴¹ Galatians 2. 7-14.

⁴² Acts 15. 36-41.

⁴³ Colossians 4. 10; Philemon 24; II Timothy 4. 11.

⁴⁴ I Corinthians 1. 10-17.

⁴⁵ Philippians 4. 2-3; Colossians 3. 13.

⁴⁶ Colossians 2. 8, 20-23; Ephesians 4. 14; I Timothy 1. 3-4.

⁴⁷ I Corinthians 5. 9 - 6. 11; I Thessalonians 1. 9; 4. 3-8; Philemon 8-19; James 2. 1-13.

⁴⁸ The seven churches addressed in Revelation are variously dealing particularly with: loss of radical discipleship; persecution; idolatry; esoteric knowledge; loss of witness; marginalisation; wealth and power. Lloyd Pieterse, *Reading the Bible after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), p. 172.

what it means to follow Jesus. This is not to overlook the commonality of the faith that all New Testament writings affirm.⁴⁹ Rather, in a panoramic reading we enter into the vibrancy, energy, and dilemmas of early Christian communities and from that vantage point we can ask questions of our own.

Some of these dilemmas occurred as Christian communities wrestled with their expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. The belief of many that they were living in the last days⁵⁰ shed fresh light on their everyday lives. One response to this common eschatological expectation was not to take part in the social convention of kin and household through neither marrying nor remarrying or through sexual renunciation within marriage. After all, if inclusion in the kingdom of God was not dependent on belonging to the nation of Israel or following the pagan gods of Greco-Roman households, but came rather through belonging to a new family in God, then maintaining conventional households and family lineages was no longer necessary. This was one of the crucial issues for the socially diverse (rich and poor, masters and slaves, women and men) majority Gentile Christians at Corinth, fresh in their experience of extraordinary Spirit-filled behaviour, who were seeking to live lives appropriate to this new age.⁵¹

While waiting for this new age, and indeed, as time passed with eschatological expectations unmet and increasing tensions with the surrounding society, Christian communities were concerned to work out their faith in the context of the expected household ordering (or codes) of the day. Some passages in New Testament epistles reflect clearly the prevalent threefold concern for proper authority of masters, husbands, and fathers over slaves, wives, and children, not least in terms of the behaviour of women in households and in the community household of believers. However, while the letters reflect the concern of the ancient world, they do not necessarily mirror its remedy. For example, in contrast to the household codes of antiquity that focus on the self-actualisation of the persons in the positions of dominance, the New Testament epistles are remarkable in addressing the persons in subordinate roles as moral agents. Hence to those with no or little legal and moral standing, Christian faith gives 'them responsibility for viewing their status in society not as a simple meaningless decree of fate but as their own meaningful witness and ministry, as an issue about which they can make a moral choice'.⁵² Hence, in contrast to the Stoic emphasis on the person in the dominant role living up to their own nature, the New Testament

⁴⁹ As Lloyd Pietersen states, in the thirteen letters of the Pauline corpus, there is both contingency (as specific situations are addressed) and coherence (as it is the same gospel being applied in the various contexts). Pietersen, p. 154.

⁵⁰ Acts 2. 17.

⁵¹ I Corinthians 7.

⁵² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 172. See also the discussion in Yoder Neufeld, pp. 98-108.

puts dominant and subordinate pairs in relationship and focuses on the responsibility of each to the other rather than to themselves.⁵³

Reading with a panoramic lens allows us to see how women and men relate as part of a bigger picture of early church life. The epistles were written, on the whole, to groups of believers and would have been received in communal settings. As with the gospels, it is important for women and for men to see women as part of these early Christian communities: Women and men were called to the one body; women and men were those in whom the word of Christ should be allowed to dwell richly; women and men were those who should teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; women and men had hearts of gratitude in which they sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God; and women and men were to do everything, whether in word or deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him.⁵⁴ Women as well as men were to be imitators of God and live in love, as Christ loved.⁵⁵ No wonder, then, that we know from the New Testament that women were active in praying and prophesying, teaching and spreading the gospel, and hosting churches, providing support, and acting as benefactors.⁵⁶

Reading with a Telephoto Lens

Finally, and briefly, it is from our grounding in wide-angle and panoramic reading that I propose we turn to a third way of reading the New Testament when thinking about gender relations. This third way is the telephoto lens – a close-up look at particular passages which are most often alluded to in thinking about the relationship between women and men. While I have argued it is misplaced to begin with these verses (or indeed to use them as the primary interpretive filter) when thinking about the social relations of women and men, that does not mean we should ignore them. We need to engage with them because they have been – and continue to be – so influential in Christian imagination. Close-up reading, when carried out alongside wide-angle and panoramic New Testament reading, offers us the opportunity to change our encounter with these texts from that of a fearsome burden, reifying women's oppression, to that of windows opening onto some of the first Christians' experiences of living out their faith. As with the rest of the New Testament, these verses show us Christians working out what it

⁵³ This is more explicit in Ephesians 5.21 - 6. 9. Some Bible translations begin this section of text not at verse 21, which says, 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ', but at verse 22 with the comment to wives to be subject to their husbands. However, verse 22 lacks the verb 'subject/submit'; this is inferred from the preceding phrase which states that believers should be subject to one another.

⁵⁴ Colossians 3. 15-16.

⁵⁵ Ephesians 5. 1-2.

⁵⁶ Luke 2. 36; Acts 21. 9; I Corinthians 11. 5; Luke 24. 10; John 4. 28-42; Acts 18. 26; Philippians 4. 2-3. II Timothy 1. 5; 3. 14-15; Titus 2. 3-5; Luke 8. 1-3; Acts 12. 12; 16. 13-15; Romans 16. 1-5; I Corinthians 16. 19; Colossians 4. 14.

means to follow Jesus in their particular circumstances, as we likewise endeavour to do in ours.

Elsewhere I have explored I Timothy 2. 8–15 in particular and I focused on this passage because, while not necessarily considered first, frequently it has been treated as the ‘trump card’ of biblical witness to the place of women as subordinate to men.⁵⁷ Whatever conclusions are drawn from the shared, divinely created humanity of female and male in Genesis 1 – 3, the liberating gender praxis of Jesus contained in the gospels, the astounding demolishing of hierarchies in Galatians 3. 28, or the enthusiastic participation of women and men in public worship at the church in Corinth, these few verses in I Timothy are used to settle any dispute or doubts about the relationship of women to men. Women, we are told, may not teach men, may not have authority over men; women must be silent (and men must speak); women must submit (and men must rule). And why is this so? Because Adam was formed first, then Eve, and it was Eve who was deceived and sinned. In effect, these verses have become the interpretive lens through which all other biblical material has been understood. Space does not allow conveying that discussion in which I posit a re-engaging with the text for a more positive and indeed more plausible reading, rather than seeing it either as determinative of a gender hierarchy or as a text to be overlooked because of issues of authorship and date. However, my chosen focus in this article on wide-angle (particularly) and panoramic reading is deliberate, for it is in these readings, I argue, that we find our foundation for revisiting verses that have for centuries been used to theologically reinforce women’s subordination.

The context of wide-angle and panoramic readings means texts previously associated with prohibitions may become aligned with permissions – of moral agency, behaviour, and activity – and even with re-ordered gender relationships of mutuality. New Testament women, both slave and free, can inhabit their newfound status in Christ as heirs of God the Father, a status to be recognised by New Testament fathers, husbands, and masters, and worked out in early church households and in communities of believers. This does not remove the ethical ambiguities, contradictions, or problems we may identify in the lived relationships that we glimpse in the text, any more than it absolves us of our responsibilities to continue to wrestle with these texts today so they are not put to abusive purposes. But an Anabaptist Christocentric approach and a feminist critique of gendered realities, combined with a suspicion of power shared by both Anabaptism and feminism, give us both the tools and outlook to guard against textual misuse.

⁵⁷ Porter, *Women and Men*, pp. 109–19.

The biblical text resists our attempts to tame it purely for our purposes. To enter into dialogue with it is to experience the ambiguities and struggles of the first generations of Christians as well as our own. As we return again and again to its narratives, we may see fresh stories that enrich and inspire us and impel us forward, even in the midst of things that have previously stunted our growth and held us back.

Conclusion

My concern here has been to show ways to approach the New Testament text for the story of gender in ways that both illuminate current impoverished readings and offer alternative expansive ones. The visual metaphor of different lenses is apt, because we need to re-orient ourselves from centuries of entrenched, yet often unacknowledged, patriarchal thinking about gender. We need to unlearn ways of seeing as well as learn anew.

I am not suggesting that Anabaptist and feminist hermeneutical stances should or could be conflated; rather that there is a useful coalescence between the two in terms of suspicion about power and in a Christocentric focus put to that end. I would argue, further, that being rooted authentically in one or more traditions (rather than attempting an amalgamation) can be useful even when traditions share characteristics. Specifically, feminist commitment ensures vigilance about gender power relations in our hermeneutical practices, something that is still very much required.

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'The Longest War': Gendercide¹

Cathy Ross

This article explores in some detail the impact of violence enacted against women globally, simply because of their gender. It draws on a range of contexts to illustrate this. It then offers an analysis of this violence through the lens of Iris Marion Young's five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. It considers the place of patriarchy and sin in colluding with this oppression and suggests one feminist understanding of and response to sin. Finally, it considers a range of missiological responses to this dilemma: a Missiology of Emptiness and Hiddenness; a Missiology of Comforting, Consolation and Healing; a Missiology of Hospitality and Relationship; and a Missiology of Sight, Embrace and Flourishing. The article concludes with a call to resistance and renewal.

Key Words

Gender; Violence; Oppression; Missiology

Introduction

'The Longest War'² is how American writer and activist Rebecca Solnit characterises violence against women. She writes: 'violence doesn't have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality, but it does have a gender'. It is of such epidemic proportions that a new term has been coined to describe this issue: 'gendercide'. The term gendercide was first used by feminist writer Mary Anne Warren in her 1985 book, *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*. The term gendercide is helpful in raising consciousness because it names and defines the problem for what it is – violence, prejudice, and bias against women and girls based on their gender.

This article will explore in some detail the impact of violence enacted against women globally, simply because of their gender. It will then offer an analysis of this violence through the lens of Iris Marion Young's five faces of oppression. It will consider the place of patriarchy and sin in colluding

¹ Parts of this paper were first published in my article 'Marvellous Makenaka: Contextual Mission, Women and the Holy Spirit in the Church', in *The Holy Spirit and the Church: Ecumenical Reflections with a Pastoral Perspective*, ed. by Thomas Hughson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp.73-98. They are reproduced here with the permission of the publisher.

² <http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175641/tomgram%3A_rebecca_solnit_the_longest_war> [accessed 2 January 2017]

with this oppression. Finally, it will consider a range of missiological responses, concluding with a call to resistance and renewal.

Gendercide

Issues of gender affect all of us. They are systemic and deeply embedded within our societal structures, so that often we are not even aware of how this injustice plays out. Let me offer an example from the United Kingdom. The annual UK *Sex and Power Report* shows a distressing absence of women from senior positions in public life. The 2011 edition claimed:

...it will take another 70 years to achieve an equal number of women directors in the FTSE 100 and another 45 years to achieve an equal number of women in the senior judiciary. It will take another 14 general elections – that is up to 70 years – to achieve an equal number of women MPs.³

That is a shocking and revealing indictment regarding representation of women at senior levels. This points to issues of lack of representation and invisibility, but it is even more depressing and distressing when we consider global violence against women and girls:

The global statistics on the abuse of girls are numbing. It appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the battles of the twentieth century. More girls are killed in this routine ‘gendercide’ in any one decade than people were slaughtered in all the genocides of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world.⁴

In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) called violence against women a ‘global health problem of epidemic proportions’.⁵

The statistics about violence against women are difficult to absorb, so this is well labelled as gendercide, to give us an awareness of the massive nature of the problem. ‘Misogyny rooted in historical, cultural and religious belief systems continues to fuel crimes and practices that target women and girls.’⁶ This is expressed in many forms throughout the world. In China, for example, the one-child policy has resulted in the forced sterilisation of women, prenatal sex identification resulting in the abortion of female

³ <<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/sex-and-power-2011>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

⁴ Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunities for Women Worldwide* (NY: Knopf, 2009), p. xvii.

⁵ Caroline Criado-Perez, *Do It Like a Woman... and change the world* (London: Portobello Books, 2015), pp. 202-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

foetuses, and tens of thousands of baby girls being abandoned. In 1990, Indian economist Amartya Sen estimated the number of Asian females missing, aborted, killed, neglected, or put to death at one hundred million.⁷

Human trafficking is another form of violence against women and girls. Although trafficking of persons affects all people, the US Department of State reports that approximately 80% of those trafficked are women and girls, of whom 50% are minors.⁸ Traffickers take advantage of natural disasters and target the most vulnerable – women and girls – because of their gender and marketability. Sex tourism and child pornography are global industries made more accessible by the internet.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of the most disturbing gender-related atrocities against women. It comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It has no health benefits and can harm women and girls in many ways. It is normally performed as a rite of passage ceremony and is an attempt to control a young girl's sexuality and to ensure her virginity for marriage. In December 2012, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the elimination of female genital mutilation. More than 125 million women and girls are living with the consequence of FGM.⁹

Early or child marriage is another violation against women. Child marriage threatens girls' lives and health, and it limits their future prospects. Girls pressed into child marriage often become pregnant while still adolescents, increasing the risk of complications in pregnancy or childbirth. These complications are a leading cause of death among older adolescents in developing countries.¹⁰ Moreover, young girls who marry before the age of eighteen have a greater risk of becoming victims of intimate partner violence than those who marry at an older age. This is especially true when the age gap between the child bride and spouse is large. Like FGM, this is a complex cultural issue but ultimately one that is harmful to women.¹¹

Rape of women and girls in war-torn areas has now been defined as a war crime. However, 'an estimated 20,000 rapes were committed in the war in Bosnia, yet they resulted in only 27 convictions; 64,000 rapes in Sierra Leone yielded six convictions; and 500,000 rapes in Rwanda, eight

⁷ <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1990/dec/20/more-than-100-million-women-are-missing/>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

⁸ Elizabeth Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide, A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), p. 47.

⁹ <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

¹⁰ <<http://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

¹¹ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/child_marriage_20130307/en/> [accessed 2 January 2017]

convictions’.¹² An Oxfam report in 2010 conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo revealed that 60% of rape victims were gang raped by armed men and that there was a seventeen-fold increase in rapes against civilians between 2004 and 2008. The report also describes the stigma of rape for the women. Only 1% of women went to the hospital with their husbands, and wives are often abandoned because of the associated stigma.¹³ Rape, ‘honour killings’, sexual assault – these forms of oppression as violence are endemic and the numbers are simply overwhelming.

In their now familiar scenario of reducing the global population to a village of 1,000 people, Amnesty International has depicted the plight of gender based violence against women to help us grasp the enormity and scandal of this issue:

In this village 500 are women. It would be 510, but 10 were never born due to gender-selective abortion or died in infancy due to neglect. 300 are Asian women. 167 of the women will be beaten or in some other way exposed to violence during their lifetime. 100 of the women will be victims of rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.¹⁴

This is a brief analysis of gender injustice with particular reference to violence against women. Feminist theologians analyse this epidemic of systemic and structural violence against women in different ways. Some analyse pornography, for example, as an expression of a power relation in which women are depicted as submissive objects that men desire to dominate. This then helps to embed distorted power relations in society at large. Julia Kristeva analyses violence through the lens of psychoanalysis and ‘claims that the social desire to brutalize and efface women’s bodies is tied to a social unconscious that secures its masculine identity by wounding or destroying the metaphoric “body of the mother/feminine”’. Others use Rene Girard’s scapegoat theory which says that groups achieve coherence and meaning through ritually enacted sacrifices of victims. They argue ‘that communities create a feminine victim whose body becomes an acceptable and accessible site for this definitive act of sacrifice’.¹⁵

¹² <<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/aug/13/opinion/ed-rape13>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

¹³ <<https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2010-04-15/new-report-shows-shocking-pattern-rape-eastern-congo>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

¹⁴ <<http://www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2370/>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

¹⁵ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology, Cartographies of Grace* (Augsburg: Fortress, 2000), p. 90.

Five Faces of Oppression

Clearly, the issue of violence against women and the fact that women are over-represented in statistics and issues of poverty, war, illness, unemployment, homelessness, migration, morbidity, and invisibility all point to a common theme of women's oppression. Broadly defined, this refers to dynamic forces – personal, social, and systemic – which diminish or deny the personhood and flourishing of women. In fact, we need many theories of oppression. We need to understand economic exploitation, where women may be underpaid, and theories about sexual violence; we need to understand cultural oppression such as FGM. We need to acknowledge the dynamics of power and domination in which women may occupy the subordinate place and therefore exercise diminished control over their lives. And, of course, the personal plays a role in the dynamics of domination: 'When feminists say that 'the personal is political' they are saying that what happens in the bedrooms, kitchens, workstations and interior dialogues of women must be included in the theories of oppression.'¹⁶

If we depersonalise oppression too much, then we fail to see the ordinary places where women can try to challenge their oppression and encourage resistance to enact social change. Iris Marion Young, who was Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, offers the following analysis of oppression. She describes five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

1. Oppression as Exploitation

In the West, this is most clearly seen in the split between the public sphere and the private sphere. Historically, this idea emerged after the Industrial Revolution with the rise of a capitalist economy and the creation of the nuclear family. 'Public and private', 'the angel in the house', and the cult of true womanhood are also part of the language and concepts which attempt to describe and analyse the state and role of women in nineteenth century Britain and America. The ideal Anglo-American woman of the nineteenth century was to be pious, pure and domesticated, able to present her home as a model of pious domesticity and a spiritual haven from a materialist world. The 'proper' sphere of women was to be in the home, while men were to be in the world. We see the legacy of this still in the West today. We find this public/private split elsewhere leading to exploitation in the labour of slaves, children, indentured labourers, servants, migrant workers – even the sex industry, polygamous families, and child brides.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

2. Oppression as Marginalisation

According to Young, '*Marginalisation* is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and extermination.'¹⁷ Young Lee Hertig from Korea gives a good example of marginalisation in her article on nineteenth-century Bible women and twentieth-century evangelists in Korea, entitled 'Without a Face', because they remained 'invisible and faceless'.¹⁸ Yet, despite this, they 'carried the gospel from house to house and were sacrificially devoted to their labour of love'. She claims that once the church began to become institutionalised, 'masculinization of the Korean church took place, and the hard labour of the Bible women remained invisible and faceless. Patriarchal leadership took over and continued to harvest the Bible women's work with women's labour credited to male leadership'.¹⁹ Chung also confirms this, claiming that the new Christian movement became 'a new version of confinement and bondage' as women were once again marginalised and so the 'Korean church became, and remains, male dominated'.²⁰

3. Oppression as Powerlessness

'*Powerlessness* is the inhibition in the development of one's capacities, lack of decision-making power in one's working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies.'²¹ This particular face of oppression is linked to not having a voice. A sense of powerlessness can make us feel trivialised and silenced. One can feel so downtrodden and disempowered that one cannot even imagine a new reality. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire talks about a culture of silence. According to Freire, oppressed people become so powerless that they do not even talk about their oppression, so they are silenced. They have no voice and no will.²²

This can also happen through indoctrination or a colonisation of the mind where people are given negative images of themselves and become

¹⁷ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 53, italics are author's.

¹⁸ Young Lee Hertig, 'Without a Face, The Nineteenth Century Biblewomen and Twentieth Century Jeondosa', in *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers, Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by D. Robert (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 186.

²⁰ M. Chung, 'Mission and Gender Justice from a Korean Protestant Perspective', in *Putting Names with Faces*, ed. by Christine Lienemann-Perrin, Atola Longkumer, and Afrie Songco Joye (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012), see pp. 224-27.

²¹ Young, *Justice*, p. 58.

²² <<https://mrdevin.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/five-faces-of-oppression.pdf>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

dehumanised. This then becomes internalised so that they cannot imagine another way or a new reality. Abolitionist Harriet Tubman wrote, 'I would have freed thousands more, if they had known they were slaves.'²³ In other words, people did not even realise that being a slave was wrong and evil – such was their level of oppression and marginalisation. Freire advocated *conscientization* – making people aware of their conditions and that another life is possible.

Grooming of young girls for illegal sexual gratification may be a good example of this form of oppression, where young women are dehumanised, drugged, and degraded to such an extent that they are powerless to extract themselves.

4. Oppression as Cultural Imperialism

'To experience *cultural imperialism* means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other.'²⁴ Cultural imperialism happens when groups develop and apply cultural standards for defining the norm and then impose this inappropriately. So in the West we might say that the norm is white, male, and heterosexual, so that even simple things such as parental leave, when meetings are scheduled, and ways of socialising may be problematic for women.

Culture can certainly be a source of oppression and this was readily acknowledged by early missionaries – foot binding of women in China or *sati* in India being obvious examples. There are also more subtle examples such as tribalism in the Majority World or 'old boys' clubs' in the Western world which can deeply embed male power. Atola Longkumer, from India, claims that discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation, and even violence exist within the church.²⁵ She explains how a lack of gender analysis has led to a truncated understanding of the gospel, so that an equal Christian community has not been created. This has led to 'a position and participatory power that is not very different from the pre-Christian mission days for the Ao women despite education and Christianisation'.²⁶ This does beg the obvious question as to why Christian mission did not seem to challenge cultural practices that were discriminatory or harmful towards women.

²³ <<https://mrdevin.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/five-faces-of-oppression.pdf>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

²⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁵ Atola Longkumer, 'Tetsur Tesayula: Christian Mission and Gender among the Ao in Northeast India', in *Putting Names*, see p.199.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

There are all sorts of cultural norms that can work against women — from not being allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, to unjust inheritance laws, to the witness of a woman being worth half that of a man.

5. Oppression as Violence

This is perhaps the most obvious form of oppression. In the UK one in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime and two women per week are killed by a current or former partner.²⁷ In the USA there is a reported rape every 6.2 minutes and one in five women will be raped in her lifetime. Violence against women and girls is defined by the WHO as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’.²⁸ The systemic causes of violence against women and girls have social, cultural, and religious roots. Violence also has long history. ‘Historical acceptance of the domination and objectification of females is a reality within every global culture and history.’²⁹

Women worldwide aged 15 to 44 years are more likely to die or be maimed because of male violence than because of cancer, malaria, war, and traffic accidents combined. American activist Rebecca Solnit, referred to earlier in this article, wrote the following (I quote her at length because it is so pertinent and powerful):

If we talked about crimes like these and why they are so common, we’d have to talk about what kinds of profound change this society, or this nation, or nearly every nation needs. If we talked about it, we’d be talking about masculinity, or male roles, or maybe patriarchy, and we don’t talk much about that.

Still, the pattern is plain as day. We could talk about this as a global problem, looking at the epidemic of assault, harassment, and rape of women in Cairo’s Tahrir Square that has taken away the freedom they celebrated during the Arab Spring — and led some men there to form defence teams to help counter it — or the persecution of women in public and private in India from “Eve-teasing” to bride-burning, or “honor killings” in South Asia and the Middle East, or the way that South Africa has become a global rape capital, with an estimated 600,000 rapes last year, or how rape has been used as a tactic and “weapon” of war in Mali, Sudan, and the Congo, as it was in the former Yugoslavia, or the pervasiveness of rape and harassment in Mexico and the femicide in Juarez, or the denial of basic rights for women in Saudi Arabia and the myriad sexual assaults on immigrant domestic workers there, or the way that the Dominique Strauss-Kahn case in the

²⁷ <<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/abuse/Pages/domestic-violence-help.aspx>> [accessed 24 June 2015]

²⁸ <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

²⁹ Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide*, p. 36.

United States revealed what impunity he and others had in France, and it's only for lack of space I'm leaving out Britain and Canada and Italy (with its ex-prime minister known for his orgies with the underaged), Argentina and Australia and so many other countries.³⁰

Patriarchy and Sin

Feminist theologians claim that we experience oppression because of patriarchy and sin. Patriarchy is understood to be an all-encompassing ideology which legitimates, normalises, and institutionalises oppression of women by men.

The social, cultural, economic and material conditions of 'patriarchy' effect a fundamental and comprehensive distortion of every sphere of human life: the construction of personal and gendered identities; the relationships between men and women; the construction of meaning and value; our relation to nature, including our own bodies.³¹

This then becomes pathological and the ideology masquerades as natural and normal; the way things are; the order of reality. The distortions are so deep and so embedded that no one is free of it. Patriarchy is bad for all of us – men and women – as it distorts reality for everyone. Moreover, we can become blinded by this as the prevailing culture and fail to see and name this oppression as sin. And then, as feminist theologian Serene Jones writes, 'we must strain hard to see, given the powerfully destructive ways in which oppression structures our thinking and makes even the most profound forms of brokenness seem normal'.³² Oppression works like a blinder, preventing us from seeing that we are caught in sin. Therefore, relations of domination begin to abound and women become disempowered and invisible.

Feminist theology critiques a traditional understanding of sin which may help us in the church as we think of a response to this situation of oppression. In 1960, Valerie Saiving Goldstein published a seminal paper entitled 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View'³³ in which she argued that selfishness and pride might be central problems for men but that it was different for women. Feminist theologians challenge the traditional understanding of sin as pride and idolisation of self. Women's sense of self may not be overabundant and typically their sense of self is submerged in

³⁰ <http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175641/tomgram%3A_rebecca_solnit_the_longest_war> [accessed 2 January 2017]

³¹ Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin, Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 145.

³² Jones, *Feminist Theory*, p. 109.

³³ Valerie Saiving Goldstein, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', *The Journal of Religion*, 40: 2 (April 1960), 100-112.

relationships with others so that women actually exercise self-negation to serve others' needs and interests to the detriment of their own.

For women, the temptation is to succumb to their dependence upon others for identity. This temptation in turn spawns typically "feminine" sins such as exaggerated self-abnegation, the loss of self in socially directed roles, and the refusal to develop one's gifts in service to God and others.³⁴

Therefore, taking pride as the paradigmatic understanding for sin expresses what is typical for men, not for women.

Feminist theologian and psychologist Mary Stewart van Leeuwen offers a compelling analysis of the Fall. She argues that, as a result of the Fall, man now suffers from domination and woman suffers from social enmeshment. Man's desire for appropriate dominion, which in its proper form was given originally to both man and woman pre-Fall, is now expressed as a desire for domination. Before the Fall, woman had a desire for intimacy and community which was distorted by sin and so her peculiarly female sin 'is to use the preservation of those relationships as an excuse not to exercise accountable dominion in the first place'.³⁵ She concludes that what started as 'creational sociability' now becomes 'fallen social enmeshment.'³⁶ So women opt out, try to keep the peace at any price, and may even avoid developing a strong, inner self. This can then lead to women becoming victims and to situations of unhealthy co-dependency. This analysis has many implications for women. In all contexts and cultures, women must be encouraged to view themselves as responsible human beings and agents, not just objects to be acted upon. It means that women do not need to find their identity in victimhood and that sometimes the harder calling will be to leave that behind. It means that, although women may indeed be acted upon unjustly, women must reject self-abnegation and resist any cultural or religious pressures to bind, demean, and diminish.

Missional Response

So what is a missional response to all of this? These are difficult issues that work on many levels. Oppression, injustice, and silencing of women's voices are bad for all of us – it is not just a women's issue. There has been an increasing recognition of this. In the UK, The Everyday Sexism Project

³⁴ M. Stewart van Leeuwen, A. Knoppers, M. Koch, D. Schuurman, and H. Sterk, *After Eden, Facing the Challenges of Gender Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 170.

³⁵ M. Stewart van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace, Women and Men in a Changing World* (Leicester: IVP, 1990), p. 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

exists to catalogue instances of sexism experienced by women on a day to day basis. This is what they say on their website:

They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalised that you don't even feel able to protest. By sharing your story you're showing the world that sexism *does* exist, it *is* faced by women *every day* and it *is* a valid problem to discuss. It is a place to record stories of sexism faced on a daily basis, by ordinary women, in ordinary places. To show that sexism exists in abundance in the UK workplace and that it is very far from being a problem we no longer need to discuss. ...To stand up and say 'this isn't right', even if it isn't big or outrageous or shocking. Even if you've got used to thinking that it is 'just the way things are'.³⁷

In September 2014, Emma Watson (famous for appearing in the *Harry Potter* films) launched the popular 'HeForShe' campaign against gender inequality. As their website states: 'HeForShe is a solidarity movement for gender equality that brings together one half of humanity in support of the other half of humanity, for the benefit of all.'³⁸

The 'five faces of oppression' analysis is one way of unravelling and understanding the injustice, while these particular analyses of sin may help us develop a more nuanced approach to liberation and salvation for women. It may also help us to understand how, in some cases, the church has enslaved women with particular understandings of sin and servanthood over the centuries. If women are continually serving the needs of others, then telling them that they are proud or pride-ful sinners may not be the best way of allowing women to flourish and find wholeness. If women are diminished and experiencing violence, then their self-confidence and self-esteem will need to be restored and they need comfort and safety.

Now I would like to offer a variety of missional approaches that women have practised and I present these by way of a response to this oppression of women:

1. A Missiology of Emptiness and Hiddenness
2. A Missiology of Comforting, Consolation, and Healing
3. A Missiology of Hospitality and Relationship
4. A Missiology of Sight, Embrace, and Flourishing

These are all approaches that women are familiar with and these are approaches that enable us to get alongside women. However, all of these approaches do mean walking a slightly perilous road. Each of these approaches could, in fact, embed injustice, suffering, and social enmeshment and so we need to be aware of that in our appropriation of these responses.

³⁷ <<http://everydaysexism.com/>> [accessed 2 January 2017] italics are iAuthor's.

³⁸ <<http://www.heforshe.org/>> [accessed 29 June 2015]

1. A Missiology of Emptiness and Hiddenness

For women, their involvement in mission is often experienced from this point of weakness, sacrifice, and invisibility. Women are familiar with approaches that are hidden, less recognised, and rarely celebrated. We ALL need to recover these perspectives in our missiology, not just women. Taken to an extreme, these could reinforce unhelpful patterns of domination and submission for women. However, I believe that Jesus' approach was one where he emptied himself for the sake of others, where he sometimes even asked people to keep his healing miracles secret, where he declared that the first would be last, and told his disciples that we all need to take up our cross to follow him. Jesus' approaches of being hidden, less known, and less recognised are Christian approaches in keeping with meekness and humility and that we all (men and women) would do well to emulate.

2. A Missiology of Comforting, Consolation, and Healing

A missiology of comforting draws from the power of the Holy Spirit to comfort, transform, and heal – both humanity and creation. The Holy Spirit, also known as the Comforter, is the one who comforts the broken, the afflicted, the suffering. God is a God of consolation who is with the HIV/AIDs sufferers, the abused women, the victims of IS, of war. Women and children are the victims of war and violence. Women struggle on to feed and protect their families, to live in reconciliation and peace, to bind up the wounded, to heal the broken-hearted.

Chung Hyun Kyung claims that Asian women believe 'in spite of' lack of protection from their fathers and brothers who may beat them or sell them into child marriage or prostitution. She writes, 'Some Asian women have found Jesus as the one who really loves and respects them as human beings with dignity, while the other men in their lives have betrayed them.'³⁹ In other words, women find consolation in their relationship with Jesus. They know that Jesus sides with silenced Asian women and can bring liberation and wholeness. Jesus is the one who can bring healing, solace, and renewal for women.

3. A Missiology of Hospitality and Relationship

A missiology of the house or a missiology of the kitchen table could be a necessary corrective to much of our missiology. This conjures up images of

³⁹ Chung Hyun Kyung, 'Who is Jesus for Asian Women?', in *Liberation Theology, An Introductory Reader*, ed. by C. Cadorette et al. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), p. 124.

intimacy, homeliness, warmth, comfort, rootedness, safety, and relationship. Hospitality is a powerful metaphor with which to think about mission. It begins with God and is an essentially outward-looking practice and virtue. Hospitality involves listening, learning, seeing the other, and negotiation of space by all parties. Generous hospitality can lead to reconciliation and genuine embrace of the other. Again, hospitality is not a simple metaphor and plays out in different ways in different contexts. While for some it may indeed mean invitation, warmth, sharing of food, and relationship, for others it may mean ongoing stress and virtual impoverishment as hospitality is demanded and expected sometimes beyond the resources available.

The whole guest/host conundrum is a fascinating study for Christian mission. Who is the guest and who is the host? This very question is demonstrated and incarnated in the life of Jesus. Jesus is portrayed as a gracious host, welcoming children, tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners into his presence and therefore offending those who would prefer such guests not to be at His gatherings. But Jesus is also portrayed as vulnerable guest and needy stranger who came to his own but his own did not receive him. (John 1.11) Pohl comments that this 'intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling for Christians'.⁴⁰ Think of Jesus on the Emmaus road as travelling pilgrim and stranger, recognised as host and who he was in the breaking of bread during a meal involving an act of hospitality. Or think of the Peter and Cornelius story (interestingly, another story involving varieties of food). Who is the host and who is the guest? Who is the insider and who is the outsider? Both offer and receive; both listen and learn; both are challenged and changed by the hospitality of the other. So we can see the importance of not only the ambiguity but also the fluidity and reciprocity/mutuality of the host/guest conundrum. We offer and receive as both guest or stranger and host.

So what does this mean for us as we engage in mission? Are we guest or host? Are we strangers to be welcomed or hosts offering hospitality? And, of course, this is where hospitality as a metaphor for mission becomes so intriguing and compelling:

Hospitality questions one's way of thinking about oneself and the other as belonging to different spheres; it breaks down categories that isolate. It challenges and confuses margins and centre. Hospitality involves a way of thinking without the presumption of knowing beforehand what is in the mind of the other; dialogue with the other is essential... To welcome the other means the willingness to enter the world of the other...⁴¹

⁴⁰ C. Pohl, *Making Room, Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), p. 17.

⁴¹ L. Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God* (NY: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 12.

Of course, this is the magic of mission and the challenge of the gospel. When we encounter the other as guest or host, insider or outsider (like Peter and Cornelius), when we engage in deep listening, we too are transformed and changed. We learn new things about ourselves and about the gospel. The whole guest/host idea begins to break down and becomes much more fluid and blurry as we learn from and relate to one another in mutual exchange and reciprocity.

4. A Missiology of Sight, Embrace, and Flourishing

The gifts of sight and insight are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Just as the women disciples were the first to see Jesus, so our eyes have to be opened to recognise Jesus also. Once we can see Jesus, the Holy Spirit enables us to see the other person. Christian mission requires that we actively see and welcome the guest and stranger in our worlds. So a missiology of sight must encourage Christians to acknowledge the identity of the other – the other who is full of potential to be realised in relationship with Christ. The actual and the potential must be seen and acknowledged together. And in this encounter with the other, I too am confronted with the truth of myself and all that I am capable of becoming. When I embrace the other, in a small way I begin to die to myself and begin to see myself in the other. John V. Taylor comments,

But no less necessary to the Christian mission is the opening of our eyes towards other people. The scales fell from the eyes of the convert in Damascus precisely when he heard one of those whose very lives he had been threatening say, “Saul, my brother, the Lord Jesus has sent *me to you*. I-Thou.”⁴²

Flourishing refers not just to human flourishing, but to our web of interdependency with all of creation. Feminist theologians have long seen the connection between exploitation of women and the domination of creation and therefore call for a re-imagination of our relationships within all of creation, so that flourishing is for all of humanity and all of creation.

A Missiology of Resistance

All these different missiological approaches are a kind of missiology of resistance. When we can authentically practise these approaches, then we are undermining power, resisting domination, and opposing oppression. Speaking for the voiceless and empowering the voiceless to speak, exposing

⁴² J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God, The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972), p. 21.

and resisting systemic evil is difficult and sometimes dangerous. To engage in a missiology of resistance, we need support; we need a community around us who will support, encourage, pray, and stand alongside us.

We are also called to be a prophetic voice. This is part of Freire's 'conscientization' process, as we try to understand the forces that alienate and oppress women, that marginalise and silence women, and then to analyse and explain, because awareness is the beginning of change. And along with change comes hope – that it does not always have to be like this; that a new world is possible.

This will also involve practical, prophetic action. Elizabeth Gerhardt, in her book *The Cross and Gendercide, A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls*, explains, 'harmful economic and political policies that do not allow for needed resources for women and their families are a hindrance for women's ability to become independent and to provide for their families'.⁴³ She explains that poverty, violence, and disease constitute a triple threat for women. In most parts of the world women bear the main responsibility for meeting the basic needs of the family, but are often denied access to the basic resources to make this possible, such as adequate nutrition, healthcare, and education. 60% of the world's hungry are women; two thirds of the world's illiterate people are female; the majority of children not in school are girls; women make up 80% of all refugees and displaced people. The cycle of poverty, violence, and disease affects women all over the world. Gerhardt claims that united efforts by churches to understand this and to challenge and shame traditional practices that oppress women will make a difference. She maintains that microfinance can make a real difference in this regard and is a good way for churches to become involved. This can empower women and give them an opportunity to feed and educate their families. She cites studies which show 'that microfinance improves not only women's financial situations but their self-confidence and their ability to make decisions that benefit their families'.⁴⁴ Improving self-confidence and self-esteem is vital when considering strategies to reduce violence. Poor men may feel equally powerless, but cultural expectations and patriarchy will ensure that men exercise dominance within their families. This is true for women everywhere. We see co-dependency and lack of self-esteem in battered wives the world over.

Gerhardt quotes studies which show that, as families become more stable, there is less stress in the family, husbands actually respect their wives more and the children have better access to health and education. The Women's Empowerment Programme in Nepal discovered that '68% of

⁴³ Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide*, p. 157.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

women in its programme experience an increase in their decision-making roles in the areas of buying and selling property, sending their daughters to school and health care for their families'.⁴⁵ Gerhardt concludes that the most effective programmes are those that are holistic and consider the cultural, political, social, and religious contexts. Another example is *28 Too Many*, which was started in 2010 by Ann-Marie Wilson as a project to undertake research and provide knowledge and tools to community-based organisations working to end FGM in the 28 African countries where it is practised and the diaspora.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Two of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals directly concern women: to promote gender equality and empower women (no. 3) and to improve maternal health (no. 5).⁴⁷ The secular world is aware that this is a major issue which needs a global strategy to resolve. We are the church. We know that without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the example of Jesus, global strategies, good and worthwhile as they may be, will not ultimately succeed. This is why gender analysis and an understanding of sin and patriarchy are important, so that we can engage in effective measures of resistance against oppression and exploitation. As the church, we are called to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalised. We are called to offer healing, wholeness, and newness of life.

When we can do that effectively, maybe our world will begin to look like this vision of girlhood offered by poet Imtiaz Dharker, a Pakistan born British poet who was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for English poetry in 2014. Let me conclude with an excerpt from her superb poem, *Night Shift*.

Night Shift (by Imtiaz Dharker)⁴⁸

I can see from your name that your mother and father
danced in the streets when you were born
and sent out sugar-sweets to tell the world a gift had come
to them, and they called you Marvellous,

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁶ <<http://28toomany.org/>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

⁴⁷ <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>> [accessed 2 January 2017]

⁴⁸ Imtiaz Dharker, *Over the Moon* (Hexham: Bloodaxe, 2014).

they called you Marvellous, they called you
Marvellous Makanaka.

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Feminist Theology, Baptists, and the Bible: an Italian Perspective

Elizabeth E. Green

This article explores the reception of ‘feminist theology and the Bible’ amongst Baptists in Italy. The ecumenical context of Italian Baptists and their own marginal location have facilitated its reception, mainly amongst women’s groups in Baptist churches and organisations. Reading strategies used by Baptists, similar to liberation methodologies, have enabled scripture reading by women to become a consciousness raising experience, understood theologically as conversion. Women’s freedom becomes gift and task to women, men, and the church. Although men generally have been reluctant to engage in the fundamental issues raised by feminism, inclusive language has been adopted in Baptist life and worship. The current resurgence of male violence against women has prompted the Italian Baptist Union to encourage men in the churches to investigate their own connivance in patriarchy, eventually undertaking their own journey of conversion through the Bible.

Key Words

Feminism; Bible; Baptist; Italy

Introduction

The churches in Italy, both Protestant and Catholic, have been particularly active over the past year in organising events to remember and honour the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In May, the Waldensian Theological College in Rome, Italy’s major Protestant academic institution where future Baptist ministers also train, and the Italian Society of Women Theologians (*Coordinamento Teologhe Italiane*), an ecumenical but predominantly Catholic group, held an international conference on ‘The Bible and Women from Reformation Times: Five Hundred Years of Change’. Scholars from England, Germany, Spain, the United States, and Italy gathered to discuss the role of women and their various uses of the Bible in the different movements which went to make up the Protestant Reformation. The conference was part of the European Society for Women in Theological Research’s ongoing Bible and Women project, which produces publications in English, German, Spanish, and Italian and is run in Italy by historian Adriana Valerio. Having heard, amongst many others, Susanna Peyronel on ‘Women and the Bible at the Beginning of the

Reformation’ and Donatella Pallotti on ‘Prophetesses and Visionaries in Seventeenth Century England’ (which actually included a number of Baptists), the conference could hardly conclude without a panel discussion on how various churches — Catholic, Anglican, and Baptist — have related to feminist theology and its own particular reading of the scriptures. What follows is an expanded version of my contribution to that discussion.

The Ecumenical Context of Italian Baptists

The opportunity to discuss feminist theology and the Bible from a Baptist perspective is certainly unusual, welcome, and thought provoking. In fact, although I have always spoken from out of a Baptist context, I have never once thought about doing ‘Baptist’ theology, but have always tried to think beyond confessional boundaries. As John Colwell has stated, ‘My aim has always been to engage in catholic theology and I have never sought to propose any theological idea that is pertinent as solely or exclusively Baptist.’¹ In my case, there are two reasons for this.

The first lies in the phenomenon of the Baptist movement itself. Baptist churches, which go back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, have no central authority of biblical or theological interpretation. Due to their congregational ecclesiology, such authority belongs to the local church. In fact, there is no such thing as the Baptist Church, but rather Baptist churches which organise themselves into Unions or something similar at a national and international level. This means that a notable pluralism exists within the so-called Baptist family, due to the complex interaction between history, theology, and culture, on the one hand, and different social and geographical locations, on the other.

The second reason why I have never thought of developing a denominational reading of scripture is that right from the beginning (in the early 1970s), feminist theology was an ecumenical enterprise; confessional divides were considered a relic of a male-centred past, more *history* than *herstory*, something that concerned men but not women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, undoubtedly one of the leading and most influential scholars in the field of New Testament feminist interpretation, is herself of German origin and Catholic persuasion. She has, however, almost always worked in the United States in the context of Protestant Universities. As feminism is not interested in replacing male forms of mastery with female ones, but rather in creating mutual and fertile relations between all human beings, women and men, it is hardly surprising that many feminist thinkers have situated

¹ John E. Colwell, ‘The Word of His Grace: What’s so Distinctive about Scripture?’, in *The “Plainly Revealed” Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Helen Dare and Simon Woodman (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2011), p. 191.

themselves on the margins or at the intersections of multiple forms of social exclusion. Fiorenza claims for herself the ‘sociopolitical location of *resident alien(s)*, as both insider and outsider’ of male-centred institutions such as the churches and the academy.²

As Baptist, then, my starting point can only be the peculiar position of Baptists in Italy, which is marginal to the wider reality of the churches (both Protestant and Catholic) and, consequently, involves quite a lot of border dwelling. Unlike many Baptists elsewhere, Italian Baptists work closely with churches born out of the magisterial Reformation, like the Waldensians, an indigenous group dating from the twelfth century, which early on (1532) became part of the wider Reformation movement. Together with Methodists and Lutherans (as well as more recent churches and groupings like the Salvation Army and the Seventh Day Adventists), Baptists form an extremely small minority over against the Catholic Church which, even in today’s changing scene, continues to enjoy cultural, political, and theological hegemony.³ In Italy, then, Protestant feminist theology is unthinkable without an almost constant dialogue with Catholicism and Italy’s own brand of feminist theory. Indeed, the opportunities for Protestant theologians to explore the relationship between feminist theology and the Bible are, more often than not, supplied by the Catholic church in one of its various expressions: local parishes, socially and politically aware movements within the church, academic institutions, women religious, or basic Christian communities. This, together with the fact that, notwithstanding the gender studies programme of the Waldensian theological college, as yet no continuous and systematic teaching of feminist theology exists in a Protestant (let alone Baptist) context in Italy, means that all our work is extremely contextual, fragmented, and only occasionally exceeds the bounds of local churches or local church related movements. An interesting case,

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 185, emphasis is author’s. Crossroads and margins feature in the thought of Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 164-72 and bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991). For a view of feminist theology standing, like Lady Wisdom, ‘at the crossroads’, see Elizabeth E. Green, ‘Al crocicchio delle strade. Teologia femminista all’inizio del XXI secolo’ in *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo* ed. by Rosino Gibellini (Brescia: Queriniana, 2003), pp. 169-82. For a recent definition of feminism by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: ‘I understand feminist/feminism to refer to a social movement and a critical theory that endeavours to make wo/men (the word wo/men includes marginalized men) recognized as responsible citizens with a full set of rights in society and religion’, *Empowering Memory and Movement: Thinking and Working Across Borders* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 384. The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states, ‘My definition of ‘feminist’ is this: a man or a woman who says, yes, we have a problem with the way gender is defined today and we have to solve it; we have to do better. All of us, women and men, have to do better’, *Dovremmo essere tutti femministi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2015), p. 41.

³ The churches I have mentioned are, together with some free churches, members of the *Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche* in Italy, which generally represents what is known as ‘historical protestantism’. The *Alleanza Evangelica* brings together evangelical and more conservative churches, while the various faces of Pentecostalism have their own regional and national associations.

then, could probably be made for a correlation between the margins consciously adopted by some feminist theologians, on the one hand, and the marginal reality of Baptists in Italy, on the other.

Baptists, Women, and the Bible

We can say that the Bible and feminist theology were certainly part of the national agenda of Baptist churches in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s, when women's admission to pastoral ministry was being debated. The discussion has been partly documented recently by journalist and Baptist pastor, Piera Egidi.⁴ In fact, we can say that from then, right up to the start of the new millennium, feminist theology and the Bible were a part of Baptist life. This was due partly to the social and political climate of the time, burgeoning (as elsewhere) with social change as far as women were concerned, and partly to those women whose training for ministry had coincided with the birth and diffusion of the women's movement. The International Baptist Theological Seminary, then located in Switzerland, was instrumental in this development. In fact, in 1981 the Italian women studying for ministry (under the auspices of a Theology Department led by the foresighted Pastor Paolo Spanu) contributed to the discussion by sending a questionnaire on women's ministry to the churches in Italy which they felt called to serve. In the ensuing debate, all the major texts examined by feminist exegesis were called into play by both proponents and opponents of women's ministry. In 1982, the Baptist General Assembly 'fully accepted' women to the pastoral ministry, actually confirming a role 'as pastoral coadjutor' that had been occupied by the American missionary Marylu Moore in Puglie (Southern Italy) six years earlier. In 1988, the General Assembly gave its blessing to the 'Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women' promulgated by the World Council of Churches and Italian Baptists worked all over Italy to promote its aims, which included removing discriminating ideas and structures from the churches and promoting women's contribution to the churches, including theology.⁵

Such developments were undoubtedly made possible by the close relationship that Baptists enjoyed with the Waldensian and Methodist churches, which had already admitted women to ministry some years before. In fact, as far as the Bible is concerned, Baptist churches share the Reformed position, holding the Bible to be foundational to the doctrine and life of the churches. Is there, however, a specifically Baptist way of reading scripture?

⁴ Piera Egidi Bouchard, *Oltre il mare del tempo: All'ascolto della storia delle donne battiste in Italia* (Torino: Nuova Trauben, 2016), pp. 136-56.

⁵ Elizabeth E. Green, *Il filo tradito: Venti anni di teologia femminista* (Torino: Claudiana, 2011), pp. 149-60.

A few years ago, Baptist scholars met to discuss precisely this question and came to the following conclusion. Over and above a generally accepted christocentrism, a Baptist reading of the Bible is characterised by three features: the role played by the local church, a transformative reading of the text, and the connection between history and imagination. These features have certainly enabled and facilitated the reception of a feminist perspective on the Bible among Italian Baptists.

For Baptists, then, the church is ‘both an acoustic and hermeneutical community: it exists by listening to the Word of God through the Scriptures and seeks to interpret the significance of the Word for the world in which it lives’.⁶ For Baptist ministers Lidia Maggi and Angelo Reginato, authors of several essays on Biblical interpretation, the plurality of the listening experience in the local community is not a mere accessory to biblical interpretation but is actually the basis of church itself. In other words, Baptists agree on the fact that the local church is the locus of biblical interpretation and ‘Early Baptists unashamedly and unabashedly engaged the scriptures from a particular theological and social location.’⁷

Having said that, we must admit that in Italy, biblical interpretation has entwined with feminist theology more in women’s groups *within* the churches than in the local churches themselves. In the 1980s these women’s groups such as the *Movimento Femminile Evangelica Battista* (MFEB) which started out from a traditional view of women’s role in church and society, focusing on children and overseas missions, virtually became separatist, so that, both nationally and locally, they were not unlike the many feminist collectives which existed at the time. In these associations, some of which, like the *Federazione delle Donne Evangeliche in Italia* (FDEI) founded in 1976 were and still are interdenominational; women met together to talk about their lives in what was still very much a ‘man’s world’, as well as to reflect upon the Word of God from the standpoint and insights generated by such conversation. To use what has become a well known phrase in feminist theological circles, we were ‘hearing each other into speech’.⁸

Women’s coming of age was not only linked to personal and group meditation on the Bible, but also focused on a greater participation in church life, both in the local church and in national structures. In fact, from 1994 right up to the present, the MFEB has organised seminars for women

⁶ Ian Birch, ‘Baptists and Biblical Interpretation’, in Dare and Woodman, *The “Plainly Revealed”*, p. 154.

⁷ Mikeal C. Parsons, ‘Early Baptist Identity and the Acts of the Apostles’, in Dare and Woodman, *The “Plainly Revealed”*, p. 27. Compare Lidia Maggi and Angelo Reginato, *Vi affido alla Parola: Il lettore, la chiesa e la Bibbia* (Torino: Claudiana, 2017), p. 19. See also: *Dire, fare e baciare: Il lettore e la Bibbia e Liberté, fraternité, égalité: Il lettore, la storia e la Bibbia* (Torino: Claudiana, 2012 and 2014).

⁸ Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 11-30.

focusing on women's leadership, many of which were based on a feminist re-reading of scriptures as the following titles show: 'In the Footsteps of Miriam' (1994); 'Upon the Wings of an Eagle: God images and self-esteem' (1995); 'The Glorious Freedom of the Daughters of God' (1996). The Baptist General Assembly had, in fact, expressed itself in favour of a greater participation of women in regional and national church structures, which would mirror their engagement in the local churches. A feminist theological reading of the scriptures was called into play in the formation of women for service both in the church and the world. Conceptually, then, a connection was made between these sorts of groups and the women-church movement, which in the final decades of the twentieth century was gaining ground all over the world.⁹ Again we notice a similarity between Baptist biblical interpretation taking place in the local church and the centrality of the *ekklesia* of women in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's own hermeneutical methodology.¹⁰

Transformation, Imagination, Story, and Worship

Baptists, both women and men, read the Bible convinced that the human words lead – if guided by the Spirit – to an encounter with the incarnate Word. The text, then, becomes 'an invitation to encounter the presence of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit'.¹¹ This means that the hermeneutical enterprise itself 'is a meeting with God' which can only be transformative.¹² We can say that a sort of identification occurs between the reading community and the Bible narrative, so that the local community actually becomes part of the biblical story and is brought into question by it. Long before personal voice criticism was theorised, Baptists, 'read the Bible with a view to imaginatively living its story'.¹³ In the women's groups I have mentioned, meeting with God through the biblical story actually became part of a consciousness raising process. Led both by the text and by a conscious reflection on their life experiences, women became increasingly aware of their exclusion from church and society as well as of the possibility of a new found freedom, understood as both gift and calling. Drawing on the work of

⁹ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

¹⁰ For a recent statement by Fiorenza, see *Memory and Movement*, p. 402. I present an overview of Schüssler Fiorenza's theology in Elizabeth E. Green, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

¹¹ Simon Perry, 'The Bible in the Flesh', in Dare and Woodman, *The "Plainly Revealed"*, p. 122.

¹² Christopher J. Ellis, 'Gathering Round the Word', in Dare and Woodman, *The "Plainly Revealed"*, p. 116.

¹³ Birch, in Dare and Woodman, *The "Plainly Revealed"*, p. 157. Compare James Wm. McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume One* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), pp. 26-34. It is hardly surprising, then, that two of the most widely used hymns in Baptist circles in Italy are 'Tell me the story of Jesus' by Fanny Crosby and 'Tell me the old, old story' by Kate Hankey, the Italian version of which was published in 1922 and is sung to the music of W. H. Doane.

theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson (Catholic) and Letty Russell (Protestant), as well as on the notion of narrative identity developed by Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero, I have read such awareness of women's discrimination and the owning of one's freedom in terms of Spirit empowered conversion mediated by the text.¹⁴

At least initially, then, part of my own hermeneutical endeavour centred on female figures in the Bible as in *Dal silenzio alla parola* ('From silence to the word') in which stories of Old Testament women are read from a feminist perspective, or in Lidia Maggi's work on female figures in both the First and Second Testaments.¹⁵ As women taking part in these groups we were able to imaginatively identify with the women in the Bible as their stories were retold, so that they became vehicles of an analogous experience of God's liberating grace. As we listened to each other, new words were born, which we then used to tell our own stories as well as those of the Bible. In this way, Bible stories centring on Miriam, Sarah and Hagar, Ruth and Naomi or on the healing of the bent woman, the woman with the flow of blood, the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, the anonymous woman's anointing of Jesus — to name but a few — all became sources of women's liberation. What was elaborated in these groups then spiralled back to the churches in sermons or publications designed to become the starting point for further study and discussion in the church as a whole.

Although not unlike 'personal voice criticism',¹⁶ the critical, plural and contextual nature of the voice brought to the text should be noted. I am thus talking about a sort of reading from below which, interestingly, probably owes more to the influence of liberation theology than to any conscious application of Baptist principles or a Baptist Bible reading methodology. In fact, Lieve Troch reports a similar experience within groups connected to the Women and Faith movement in the Netherlands: 'When women work systematically in feminist Bible study, new stories emerge; the reality of women's lives changes and become new.'¹⁷

The point I am making is that the positive outcome of a feminist reading of the Bible amongst Baptist women in Italy, in the context of groups like the MFEB or the FDEI, was at the time undoubtedly due to having

¹⁴ Green, *Il filo*, pp. 179-94. Compare Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); Adriana Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti. Filosofia della narrazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997).

¹⁵ Elizabeth E. Green, *Dal silenzio alla parola. Storie di donne nella Bibbia* (Torino: Claudiana, 1992); Lidia Maggi, *Le donne di Dio: Pagine bibliche al femminile e L'evangelo delle donne: Figure femminili nel Nuovo Testamento* (Torino: Claudiana, 2009 and 2010).

¹⁶ *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Ingrid R. Kitzberger (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁷ Lieve Troch, 'A Method of Conscientization: Feminist Bible Study in the Netherlands', in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, Vol. 1, ed. by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM, 1994), p. 352.

adopted a known and shared methodology with which women who were used to reading the Bible in the context of a local Baptist church could identify.

Much of this reflection was undertaken by calling on a ‘hermeneutics of creative imagination’, to use Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s phrase, as Baptist women engaged with the scriptures through dance, mime, painting, writing, and other creative activities producing songs, sermons, stories, prayers, and confessions of faith.¹⁸ Midwifed by many of my colleagues (such as pastors Gabriela Lio, Lidia Giorgi, Lidia Maggi, Anna Maffei, Silvia Rapisarda, and Cristina Arcidiacono), the meeting of the Bible with feminist theology continues to be expressed less in the language of secondary theology and more in that of primary theology. As Christopher Ellis has remarked, ‘The distinction between primary and secondary theology can prompt us to reflect that the most sympathetic vocabulary to aid the exposition of scripture may well be the vocabulary of worship.’¹⁹ On the one hand, then, this has meant that a great deal of feminist interaction with the Bible has been (and indeed still is) tied to a particular time and place and lasts (if counter measures are not taken) for the duration of the worship service. On the other hand, the adoption of inclusive language in worship in most Baptist churches in Italy, as well as in the recently published hymnal by Baptist musician Carlo Lella, has been one of the lasting contributions of feminist theology to Italian Baptist life.²⁰

Not Only But Also...

I have suggested that the way Baptist churches are used to reading the scriptures from below — imaginatively identifying with the Bible story and laying themselves open to the personal and social transformation it conveys — has facilitated the use of that feminist biblical interpretation which understands itself as a ‘critical theology of liberation’ and adopts its reading methods.²¹ However, this is not the only way in which feminist theology and the Bible have come together in my own work as a theologian who also happens to be a Baptist. In my book *Il vangelo di Paolo: Appunti per una lettura femminile (e non solo)*²² (‘The Gospel of Paul: Notes for a Reading (Not Only) in the Feminine’), written with one eye on the Catholic church’s

¹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), p. 179.

¹⁹ Ellis, in Dare and Woodman, *The “Plainly Revealed”*, p.122.

²⁰ *Celebriamo il Risorto: Inni e canti per l’annuncio dell’evangelo* (Torino: Claudiana, 2013).

²¹ The phrase refers to the title of one of Schüssler Fiorenza’s early essays published in *Theological Studies*, 36 (1975), 606-26, whose contents she has continuously re-proposed.

²² Elizabeth E. Green, *Il vangelo di Paolo: Appunti per una lettura femminile (e non solo)* (Torino: Claudiana, 2009).

celebration of the apostle Paul's two thousandth birthday (2008-2009) and the other on a rehabilitation of Paul's groundbreaking interpretation of the Gospel for the churches, I self-consciously drew on some of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's central ideas.²³ These have to do with the importance of reading exclusive language inclusively and decoding the gendered nature of speech.²⁴

For example, in the first part of the book, I explored, with the help of the work of biblical scholar Antoinette Wire and theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, what Paul's gospel would have meant not only to the men he overtly addressed but also to the women who are subsumed under a supposedly generic male language. Paul, interpreting the gospel from his own high social and religious status in terms of humiliation, is unable to unpack its revolutionary aspects for women which, as I Corinthians shows, tends to go in the opposite direction of exaltation.²⁵ In the second part, I look at how Paul uses gendered language occasionally in striking ways (as he adopts a feminine position, speaking of himself as mother), although more often in ways that confirm the working of the patriarchal social world. A final section looks at the women Paul mentions by name in his letters. By investigating the terms Paul uses to describe them, such as co-workers and apostles, we discover no trace of the negative and limiting views of women Paul expresses elsewhere and for which he has become famous.²⁶

An Appraisal

If the Baptist way of reading the Bible has facilitated the reception of feminist theology in the sort of women's groups I have been describing, what about the churches themselves? How far have they recognised, adopted, and encouraged reading the Bible from a feminist perspective? That question cannot be answered without taking into account the rapid change in the position of women in Italian society in the last fifty years, nor without mentioning the shifts in feminist theory itself. As far as the first is concerned, the patriarchal family was finally laid to rest in 1975, when the new family law gave equal rights and responsibilities to both spouses. In 1981, the law which considered male honour extenuating circumstances in crimes

²³ Although this is an approach 'from above', I should say that the initial study was occasioned by a public lecture organised by the Baptist Church in Naples.

²⁴ Again, for a recent statement, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory and Movement*, pp. 388ff.

²⁵ Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). In Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1983) and *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992), Ruether differentiates between male and female journeys of transformation.

²⁶ For Schüssler Fiorenza's own detailed reading, first published in 1978, see *Memory and Movement*, pp. 423-46.

committed against women was abolished. However, as is widely recognised, legal status is one thing, cultural norms and views another. While the legal status of women in Italy has advanced rapidly since 1946, putting women on an (almost) equal footing with men and increasingly defending them from different forms of male violence, change in society's (and the church's) view of sex or gender stereotypes not only proceeds at a slower pace, but has in fact actually slowed down as patriarchal backlash takes its toll. As Vittoria Franco affirms: 'There are times, and this is one of them, when it is quite clear that rights have not been acquired once and for all, but can become ineffective and actually lost.'²⁷ Over the past fifty years feminist theory itself has developed along the well known and not necessarily mutually exclusive lines of liberation, sexual difference, or French feminism (enthusiastically received and developed in Italy), gender theory and perhaps even beyond.²⁸ Identity politics have given way to an increasing awareness of how different forms of exclusion and discrimination (based on gender, sexual identity, religious persuasion, economic status, country of provenance) collude and co-operate with each other. Present day analysts agree on the complex and multilayered nature of a patriarchy, which seems both to be at death's door and very much alive and kicking.²⁹

However, if in this complex and fluctuating situation, in which Italian Baptists are completely (if not always willingly) immersed, some sort of an appraisal is to be made, I would say that feminist theology has become part of the churches' hermeneutical baggage to the extent that women themselves have acquired not only a feminist consciousness and adequate hermeneutical tools but also sufficient clout to get their voices heard in the mixed environment of the local church. The question, then is a political one.

In Italy, the interaction between feminist theology and the Bible in Protestant churches generally, and Baptist ones in particular, faces the same problems with which the women's movement on the whole must get to grips. The first is the question of the transmission of knowledge among women, and especially among women of different generations. It is a well known fact that women dealing with feminist issues, theory, and especially theology, have the sensation that each time they are 're-inventing the wheel'. Basic tenets once taken for granted have to be argued for again and again. As Schüssler Fiorenza has stated, these problems touch vital issues of women's continued poor self-esteem and reluctance to recognise each others'

²⁷ Vittoria Franco, *Care ragazze. Un promemoria* (Torino: Donzelli, 2010), p.8. Several works have dealt with the diminished status of women in Berlusconi's Italy, one of the best known being a video produced by Lorella Zanardo, *il corpo delle donne*, <<http://www.lorellazanardo.it/blog/>> [accessed 06 July 2017]

²⁸ Elizabeth E. Green, 'Teologia e genere. Un'introduzione', *Protestantesimo* 68:3-4 (2013), 247-59.

²⁹ For example, Selene Zorzi, *Il genere di Dio: La Chiesa alla prova del Gender* (Molfetta: La Meridiana, 2017), pp. 84-7.

authority, resulting from the simple fact of being women in a world which continues to revolve around men.³⁰

The second issue, of course, is the transition from women's groups to the community of women and men in church and society. The days of separatist feminism are certainly over and gender relations are currently in a state of flux and transformation. On the whole, men have yet to become aware of their own role in systems of oppression and this general lack of awareness continues to affect theological education and the life of the churches. As the construction of male and female (masculine and feminine) are mutually related, any change in the one automatically calls the other into question. Yet men are still slow to make the needed changes. On the one hand, the partial and gendered nature of the subject long since recognised in feminist theory has yet to shift the so-called universal and neutral subject out of pole position. If the marginality of Baptists, at least in Italy, could cogently be argued for, as I suggested at the beginning, then it could be said that Baptist men have so far failed to adopt and make sense out of that peculiar Baptist position. On the other hand, as Protestant and Baptist women, we have yet to reflect upon the predominantly male nature of church organisation. The ecumenical nature of feminist theology, based on an analysis of patriarchy as hierarchy (of which the Catholic church is a supreme example) has not been particularly helpful for laying bare how the exclusion of women is effected in structures which aim to be democratic. This, of course, does not mean that women are not active on all levels of church life and organisation (far from it) but that the male subject is still presumed to be the normative centre of such structure and its theological mainstay.

There is, however, in the somewhat gloomy scenario I am describing, one area in which our brothers are not completely avoiding the interplay between feminist theology and the Bible. I am referring to the *raison d'être* of feminist theology itself, that which continues to work as a deterrent to women's full inclusion in society, male violence against women. In Italy such violence has been on the Baptist churches' agenda from the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) onwards. Last year, the Baptist General Assembly affirmed that confronting this issue is mandatory for every believer and urged the men's working group on gender violence instituted two years ago to offer concrete proposals to the churches. This means that the interaction between feminist theology and the Bible is once again becoming of interest to the local churches as concerned men and women speak out against male violence against women. Furthermore, some men, inspired by the sort of consciousness raising that

³⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory and Movement*, pp. 357-66.

sparked off the women's movement as well as by feminist theory in general, have actually begun calling their own privileged position in church and society into question. Pastors such as Massimo Aprile, Carmine Bianchi and Simone Caccamo are all sensitive to these issues and some have started up men's groups within a Baptist context, producing readings of the Bible from below, that is out of the awareness of the partial (and perhaps marginal?) nature of their own gender. Once again, I would say that this is possible, not only due to the long history of feminist issues (including biblical interpretation) in Baptist churches, as well as the continuous struggle against gender related violence undertaken by women's organisations like the MFEB and FDEI, but also to the ecumenical context in which Baptist churches operate. In fact similar men's groups exist both within basic Christian communities and amongst the Waldensians.

Baptist churches share the Reformed view of scripture. In Italy their reading of scripture from below, not unlike the sort of liberation readings practised in basic Christian communities, has allowed a rich and fertile meeting between feminist theology and the Bible, especially in church based women's groups. This hermeneutical reflection, rooted in the thought and practice of the women's movement, shares the ecumenical thrust of feminist theology both at national and international levels. However, I have also suggested that, were Italian Baptists to recognise and own their peculiar position on the margins and borders of other church institutions, both women and men could be inspired by a way of reading the Bible which privileges margins and walks along borders. If the impact feminist theology has begun to make on Baptist churches in Italy is to become lasting and meaningful, going beyond an inclusion of women in male roles and the use of inclusive language in assemblies and worship, it is imperative that both men and women claim the partial nature of their own gender as well as the specific social location from which together we read the Bible.

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The Bible, Character Ethics, and Same-Sex Relationships¹

Marion Carson

The traditional hermeneutical approach to biblical ethics, which asks the question “What ought we to do?”, has led us into some difficulties with regard to the question of same-sex relationships. In particular, it has made the church vulnerable to charges of selectivity with regard to our use of Scripture and failing to live up to biblical values such as mercy, compassion, and church unity. This paper suggests that adopting a hermeneutic based on character ethics, rather than on deontology or utilitarianism, would help Christians to avoid these pitfalls and enable the church to develop a response which is more faithful to Scripture as a whole.

Key Words

Same-sex relationships; Character ethics; Biblical hermeneutics; Church unity; Pastoral practice

Introduction

The question of whether Christians may be permitted to engage in same-sex relationships is a highly contentious one for Baptists, and indeed the church as a whole. For some, especially those living in countries in which same-sex marriage or civil partnerships have been made legal, the question is problematic for pastoral practice. What do we do if a gay couple comes to our church? What do we do if they want to get married or enter into a civil partnership, or are already married? For others, questions such as these are irrelevant, even meaningless. For them, the Christian view is, and always has been, that same-sex relationships are sinful, and those who engage in them have no place in the church. A less stringent view permits practising homosexuals to be part of the Christian community, but prohibits them from being in leadership roles.²

¹ This essay is a developed version of a paper given at the EBF Commission for Theology and Education Consultation on Homosexuality which took place in Smidstrup Strand, Denmark, 16-18 November 2016.

² For an overview and analysis of current shifting views amongst evangelicals with regard to the Bible and same-sex relationships see Ad de Bruijne, ‘Homosexuality and Moral Authority: A Theological Interpretation of Changing Views in Evangelical Circles’, in *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority*, ed. by Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas and Eveline van Staaldoune-Sulman (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2016), pp. 143- 62; Nigel G. Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), pp. 131-49.

Differences of opinion such as these have produced something of a crisis in the church. Discussion of the issue is often inhibited because of fear. Those who equate same-sex relationships with sin fear that, should practising homosexuals be accepted in our communities, the integrity of the church will be compromised. On the other hand, those who question this stance often fear that if they even raise the subject, the unity of the church will be threatened. Why have we got to this situation? Why do churches split, or threaten to split, over this issue? The reason, of course, is the Bible. However much we may say that there are cultural reasons for people being anti-gay, and pastoral reasons for being pro-gay, the issue ultimately boils down to this: does the Bible say that same-sex relationships are sinful, or not? And for centuries, the answer to this question has been considered obvious. Yes, homosexual behaviour is a sin, and those who engage in it should be outlawed from our churches. However, for many Christians today, this view does not adequately take into account other aspects of biblical teaching, for example, principles such as covenant relationships and fidelity. Nor does it make allowance for the profound suffering of many who find themselves excluded because of their sexual orientation. Serious disagreement ensues: ‘traditionalists’ think that their opponents are failing to obey clear biblical teaching, while ‘liberals’ consider their opponents to have a blinkered view which lacks compassion.³ The result is impasse, mutual suspicion, and often acrimonious division.

This is deeply troubling, for, as faithful readers of Scripture we cannot ignore Jesus’ prayer for unity amongst his followers (John 17.20-24), or Paul’s warnings against factionalism and division (such as I Corinthians 1.10-17). Should we not be doing our utmost to find a way through these difficulties? The question I want to address here, therefore, is this: how can we be faithful readers of Scripture on this deeply contentious question, without at the same time descending into disunity? It is not my primary purpose to give an exegetical study of the commonly cited passages – there are plenty of studies which do precisely that.⁴ Nor will I discuss contemporary scientific, medical, psychological, and cultural understandings of human sexuality, although these are important.⁵ Rather, I wish to focus on

³ For collections which present the arguments from differing viewpoints, see *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church*, ed. by Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); David L. Balch, *Homosexuality, Science and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁴ See, for example, Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 379-406; Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

⁵ See, for example, Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).

how the Bible has been used in the debate, exploring in particular some of the assumptions which underpin what I am calling the ‘traditional’ approach. Is this approach sufficient to help us determine how we should respond to same-sex relationships in the pastoral setting? Has it allowed us to interpret Scripture with integrity? I will suggest that it owes much to deontological and utilitarian views of ethics, and that, although it might help us to determine our view with regard to the morality of same-sex relationships, it is not so helpful with regard to how we should respond pastorally, and is less than faithful to the teaching of Scripture as a whole. I shall go on to propose that a hermeneutic based on character ethics might enable us to find a way through the polarised opinions and lead us toward a more nuanced and compassionate pastoral response.

The ‘traditional’ approach to Scripture and the question of same-sex relationships

The hermeneutical approach most commonly adopted assumes that we can look to Scripture for instruction on the question of same-sex relationships. It asks whether homosexual activity is sinful or not, believing that if we find an answer we will know what to do in the pastoral setting. The natural first step is to look for passages which are understood to refer explicitly to homosexual activity – in particular, Leviticus 18.22; 20.13; Romans 1.26-27; I Corinthians 6.9-10 and I Timothy 1.9-11. The task is to look first for the ‘plain meaning of the text’, and, where that is uncertain, to determine using historical-critical methods, what the author’s intention might have been. Having established the view of the text on the morality of same-sex relationships, the procedure is to apply them in the contemporary setting.

From this starting point, the message of the Leviticus passages seems clear enough. Same-sex relationships are an ‘abomination’. In Romans 1, Paul sees homosexual activity as symptomatic of humanity’s rebellion against God. While some doubt that Paul has in mind here the kind of committed same-sex relationships which are increasingly common today,⁶ the majority view is that this passage is deeply disapproving of all homosexual activity. Things are less straightforward in I Corinthians 6.9-10 and I Timothy 1.9-11, in which the words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* appear, terms whose meaning is uncertain. Some argue that they refer to a kind of sexual exploitation or pederasty found in Hellenistic culture, or sexual promiscuity in the temples, rather than the same-sex relationships which are common today, and therefore that we cannot deduce a prohibition from

⁶ See, for example, Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*.

them.⁷ For many others, however, there is little doubt that these passages view same-sex activity with disapproval.⁸ At present, given the inconclusive nature of some of the evidence, it is the responsibility of each reader of Scripture to weigh up the evidence and come to his or her own decision.

Historical-critical exegesis, therefore, has enabled us to determine the Bible's teaching on the morality (or otherwise) of same-sex relationships. However, the questions cannot end there. If we designate same-sex relationships as sinful, what should we do when we are confronted with that sin in our communities? Since, as evangelicals, we profess to having a high view of Scripture and to a desire to be faithful to it, it seems appropriate that we return to the Bible for guidance. What, according to Scripture, is our pastoral responsibility?

Returning to Leviticus, we read that the 'abomination' must be punished: both parties are to be put to death (Leviticus 20.13). However, in twenty-first century Europe, the death penalty is no longer lawful. Leviticus 20.13 cannot, therefore, provide us with instruction as to our pastoral response. In I Corinthians 6.9-11, however, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* are said to be excluded from the Kingdom of God. If these terms are understood to refer to homosexual activity, it might be concluded that people who behave in this way following conversion are placing themselves outside of God's rule and so cannot be said to be a part of God's kingdom. Thus, although there is no direct instruction in these verses to exclude those in same-sex relationships from our communities, the church's tradition that this is the correct response seems a natural inference to make.

Nevertheless, Christians who desire to be faithful readers of Scripture cannot ignore the fact that in the New Testament passages under discussion, same-sex activity is only one example of behaviour deemed contrary to God's will. In Romans 1, Paul says same-sex activity is indicative of an idolatrous mind-set, but he goes on to list many other examples, including (*inter alia*) envy, covetousness, malice and gossip, boastfulness, and even foolishness. In I Timothy 1.9-11, the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* appear alongside murder, theft, perjury, slave-trading, and the rather vague phrase 'whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching'. In I Corinthians 6 they are included in a list of sins which Paul says will exclude people from the kingdom of God:

⁷ See, for example, Dale B. Martin, 'Arsenokoitês and Malakos: Meaning and Consequences', in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. by Robert L. Brawley (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 117-36; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁸ The conservative view of the meaning of these terms is represented by Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 303-40; David F. Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ (I Cor 6:9; I Tim 1:10)', *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), 125-53.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites,¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (I Corinthians 6.9-10 NRSV)

The conclusion is clear. If we deduce from these passages that people in homosexual relationships should be excluded from our communities (or from leadership), we must also exclude those who commit the other sins listed there. Faithful obedience to Scripture's demands means that we must exclude those who are (for example) wilfully greedy, who continuously gossip, and who cause quarrels, not to mention those who are envious, malicious and even foolish. In fact, the inclusion of 'idolaters' in the list should make us very cautious about declaring anyone an outsider. For in Romans 1, Paul insists that *everyone* is guilty of idolatry, and in chapters 6-8 he shows that the sanctification of believers is a work in progress: our transformation remains incomplete until the full glory of God is revealed. Until then the tendency for all of us to fall into all manner of idolatrous behaviour remains. We must, therefore, have very good reasons for excluding homosexuals from our communities while allowing other 'wrongdoers' to remain.

A normative pattern?

It should be obvious by now that the 'traditional' approach to Scripture has led us into something of a difficulty. For, while the problem of the morality of same-sex relationships may have been resolved to our satisfaction, the question of appropriate pastoral response remains problematic. The common inference has been that people in same-sex relationships should be excluded from church communities, on the grounds that they are failing to live under the rule of God. However, while church history shows that we have been fairly consistent in doing this, we have equally consistently ignored, or left unchallenged, the many other forms of idolatrous behaviour which are to be found in our midst. It is hardly surprising therefore, that those who believe that there is no place for same-sex relationships within the church are often charged with selectivity (with regard to their reading of Scripture) and hypocrisy (with regard to their response to sin).

Most thoughtful readers of Scripture realise, however, that rigid adherence to rules can (and does) seem to many to be at odds with biblical values such as compassion and mercy, values to which they wish to be loyal. Accordingly, it is often argued that Scripture also provides a pattern for human sexual relations which God's people should follow. The contention is that throughout the biblical literature, from the creation narrative (Genesis 1.26-28) to the metaphor of the church as the Bride of Christ (e.g. Ephesians

5.25ff; Revelation 21.2), heterosexual relations are assumed to be normative. This pattern is God's prescription for the wellbeing of his creation, and conformity to it is the best way for men and women to live. By the same token, to deviate from this pattern is to violate God's will.⁹

Of course, merely referring to the existence of such a pattern cannot in itself provide us with instruction. We can only infer that behaviour is either congruent with or at odds with it. Since the pattern consists of male-female relationships, it follows that same-sex relations fall into the latter category. It is often held that those who wilfully do not conform to this pattern should desist from the behaviour or be excluded from the church. The logic is that those who persist are deliberately setting themselves against God's purposes for his creation – not only bringing disorder into his orderly design, but also being knowingly disobedient.

This, however, presents us with a difficulty. The story of the creation of man and woman tells of a time when there was no disordered sexuality of any sort. And as the rest of Scripture attests, the world is no longer in this original, ideal state. Rather, it, and all human behaviour, indeed all human desire, is in a state of deep disorder.¹⁰ So it must be concluded that *all* human sexual behaviour is disordered. We cannot therefore insist that the pattern described in the pre-Fall narrative be prescriptive for all, when no-one (no matter what their sexual orientation might be) can hope to live up to the standard.¹¹ What we can do, however, is keep this ideal state in view and attempt to bring order into a disordered world. The traditional way of doing this has been to say that some regulation of human sexuality is required, and, rather than disbaring all sexual activity altogether, allow for heterosexual relationships within the confines of marriage. As Paul says in I Corinthians 7.2, 'because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband'. Marriage, then, is given to enable us to keep orderliness in our communities in a (pale) reflection of the kind of order which God ordained before the Fall.

There is little doubt that this approach to Scripture helps to move the argument forward. Avoiding the pitfalls of proof-texting, it takes the whole of Scripture into account. It also seems to help with difficulties regarding pastoral responsibility. Acknowledging that all human sexuality is disordered, it is taught that sexual activity should be kept within the confines of heterosexual marriage. In this way God's pattern is honoured, and order maintained. It follows that same-sex relationships cannot be accepted in the

⁹ Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Relationships* (Nottingham: IVP, 2015), pp. 81-95; Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 379-406; Ulrich W. Mauser, 'Creation and Human Sexuality in the New Testament', in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, ed. by Brawley, pp. 3-15.

¹⁰ See Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, p. 24.

¹¹ David P. Gushee, *Changing our Minds*, 2nd edn (Canton: Read The Spirit Books, 2015), pp. 97-98.

Christian community, and that homosexuals should be celibate. If it is asked how this can be compatible with our knowledge of a merciful and loving God, it is answered that God's ordained pattern can be nothing but loving and merciful in its intention. Pastoral responsibility, therefore, entails supporting homosexual people in the struggle that they may have to remain within God's good and perfect will.

This is a very attractive approach to take, and indeed many people of same-sex orientation have found great comfort in it. Importantly, it seems congruent with the biblical evidence. Jesus (certainly) and Paul (probably) led celibate lives, and both expressed the view that it is better for believers to be free of family responsibilities. Indeed, Jesus saw a conflict of interests between family and discipleship, a conflict which is best resolved by remaining celibate and eschewing the comforts of family life for the sake of the kingdom (e.g. Matthew 19.10-12; Luke 5.11; 9.61, 62; 14.26, 27). Paul put it another way: family responsibilities distract people from the spreading of the gospel, preventing them from devoting themselves to being disciples of Christ (I Corinthians 7). According to the New Testament, therefore, voluntary celibacy is preferable to the married state. As Michael Vasey says, for Jesus, Paul and the early church, 'The new society that Jesus was creating was one in which membership was based not on marital, ethnic or social status but on adoption into the new humanity forged by Christ himself.'¹² Now, of course, this teaching does not constitute a prohibition, and there are other passages within the New Testament which clearly teach that marriage does have a place in the church and indeed should be honoured (Ephesians 5.21-33; Hebrews 13.4). The two teachings need to be held in tension. The idea of heterosexual marriage in Christian thinking is inextricably bound up with the command to procreate (Genesis 1.28), and there is undoubtedly a responsibility to bring up children to become faithful disciples of Christ.¹³ However, in many churches there can be an (unspoken) expectation that Christians *should* marry and have children – which is quite a move away from the teaching of Jesus and Paul.¹⁴

Nevertheless, even if we were to embrace the teaching that celibacy is the better state for Christians and encourage singleness for the sake of the Gospel (which we seldom do), it is still true that heterosexual people would have the option to remain single or to marry, while homosexual people do not. At this point, it is often argued that same-sex attracted people are no different from other single people, or those who are unable to be in a sexual

¹² Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, p. 33.

¹³ See, for example, Stephen Holmes' (Augustinian) argument that same-sex relationships are inadmissible because the primary purpose of marriage is procreation, in *Two Views on Homosexuality*, ed. by Sprinkle, pp. 166-93.

¹⁴ Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem*, pp. 47-52.

relationship for whatever reason: they must simply be strong and accept that celibacy is God's will for them.¹⁵ Now it is true that some Christian homosexuals feel that this is the right response, and they live their lives in accordance with this. Others, however, detect double standards. They point out that there is a difference between lack of opportunity and prohibition. A prohibition against same-sex relationships denies homosexual people permission to have sexual relations, at any time and under any circumstances – something which does not apply to heterosexual people. Moreover, marriage is much more than a matter of being able to indulge in sexual intercourse with impunity. While the concept of marriage varies from culture to culture, inherent in it are agreements with regard to property, inheritance, and companionship.¹⁶ Therefore, in denying homosexual people the possibility of marriage, or even of intimate relationship in a recognised partnership (whether it is 'civil' or 'blessed' by the church), we are also denying them the companionship and legal security with regard to property and inheritance which married couples may take for granted. That this causes much suffering to a great many people leads many to conclude that the church's conventional stance of prohibition is at odds with the biblical teaching on compassion and mercy – not to mention principles of covenant relationship and fidelity (see, for example, Genesis 31.43; II Samuel 5.3; I Samuel 18.3; Psalm 55.20).¹⁷

A third approach: character ethics

Thus far we have noted two approaches which have dominated attempts to answer the question of what the Bible has to say about same-sex relationships. The first seeks instruction and the second argues from a 'normative' pattern. In the first, the hermeneutical assumption is that the Bible provides us with rules for living. Once the rule is found, it must be followed simply because it is found in Scripture. The second recognises the importance of being able to say *why* same-sex relationships are to be considered sinful, and finds them to be incongruent with God's plan for his creation. As we have seen, however, these two approaches have raised some serious difficulties with regard to our understanding of the texts and our pastoral practice. First, we must acknowledge that there is still some doubt as to the exact meaning of some of the most salient texts. Second, it is not always clear how these texts relate to other aspects of biblical teaching, for example with regard to pastoral practice. Third, the focus on same-sex

¹⁵ See, for example, Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 402.

¹⁶ See Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2006).

¹⁷ See, for example, Gushee, *Changing our Minds*, pp. 99-105.

relations as the central issue in these texts is a highly selective approach which opens us up to charges of hypocrisy and lack of integrity.

These two hermeneutical approaches reflect the ways that ethics has been discussed in western philosophy over the last few hundred years. The first stems from deontology, which looks for rules to follow, and the second is close to (rule) utilitarianism, which seeks to find the greatest good for the greatest number. Both take the question “What ought we to do?” as their starting point. Both wish to find instruction to put into practice. Given the dominance of these approaches in Western religious and secular ethical thinking, it is natural that the church should also be influenced by them.

In recent years, however, an alternative way of approaching ethics has been gaining favour, one which might help to find a way through these difficulties. Increasingly, the quest for rules seems to many to be simplistic and sometimes even counterproductive. Who, for example, decides who should make these rules? Rules which apply well in one setting may not transfer into another. Utilitarianism, in which the rationale for ethical decision-making is to seek the greatest good for the greatest number, remains highly influential. However, this can (and frequently does) lead to prescriptions for happiness which fail to acknowledge human difference. Moreover, the majority is not always right.¹⁸

Because of these problems, some prominent ethicists (Christian and non-Christian alike) have been looking to the idea of the virtues to help them find a new way of thinking.¹⁹ Character (or virtue) ethicists suggest that certain habits of mind – such as temperance, patience, and perseverance – can, if developed, enable us to live wisely and create thriving communities. The crucial difference is that the central ethical question changes from “What ought we to do?” to “What kind of people should we be?” Thus, ethics becomes a matter of character and wisdom rather than duty or the pursuit of happiness (the good) for the majority. Rules may still be necessary, and indeed are, but even more important is the ability to use them wisely for the benefit of our communities.

These central ideas of character ethics have become highly influential. In psychology, for example, there is increasing recognition of a need for wise practitioners who are not hidebound by procedures and measurement of outcomes.²⁰ The ideas are also proving deeply influential in theology. In particular, Stanley Hauerwas has argued that Christian ethics cannot be reduced to a matter of obedience to rules. Rather it is concerned with

¹⁸ For an introduction to these major theories see John Deigh, *An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edn (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

²⁰ See, for example, Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

developing habits of mind which help to form ‘communities of character’. In order to find out how to do this, we should look to Scripture and the example of those around us. Hauerwas says,

Christians claim to attribute authority to Scripture because it is the irreplaceable source of the stories that train us to be a faithful people. To remember, we require not only historical-critical skills, but examples of people whose lives have been formed by that memory. The authority of Scripture is mediated through the lives of the saints identified by our community as most nearly representing what we are about. Put more strongly, to know what Scripture means, finally, we must look to those who have most nearly learned to exemplify its demands through their lives.

²¹

As we follow these examples we develop the habits of mind which are distinctively Christian. They become part of the fabric of our lives, informing our moral decision-making and pastoral responses to the human experiences which we encounter in our communities. In this way we can build a church which will demonstrate to the world ‘how all people will live in the kingdom of God’.²²

Character ethics as a hermeneutical lens

How does this affect how we interpret Scripture? It means that the aim of reading the Bible is not primarily to find rules, but to discover what kind of people we should be, both individually and in community. The experiences and struggles of Israel and the early church teach us what it means to be the people of God, as do the traditions (wisdom, prophecy, epistles) left to us by those who documented and reflected on them. We read the stories of individuals (Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Peter, for example) whose lives demonstrate the values and attitudes pleasing to God. And the prime exemplar, of course, is Christ himself. James McClendon notes, ‘Whatever difficulties scholars may find in the re-creation of the chronological biography of Jesus, his character is the touchstone of the Christian life.’²³ So, as Philippians 2.5-11 tells us, the answer to the question, “What kind of people should we be?” is this: Christians are to be people whose lives are characterised by humility, self-sacrifice, and compassion.²⁴

²¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM, 1984) (2nd edn, 2003), p. 70; see also his *Communities of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

²² Nancey Murphy, ‘Using MacIntyre’s Method in Christian Ethics’, in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, ed. by Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 32.

²³ James Wm McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories can Remake Today’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), p. 33.

²⁴ For this approach to Scripture and ethics see, for example, David S. Cunningham, *Christian Ethics: The End of the Law* (London: Routledge, 2008); *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by William P. Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Stephen E. Fowl and

From this perspective, an appeal to Scripture for guidance with regard to same-sex relationships is not concerned primarily to determine what we should *do*, but rather, to discover how we can be wise and faithful followers of Christ. It remains appropriate to start with pertinent passages, using the historical-critical tools at our disposal. Crucially, there will still be disagreements as to their interpretation.²⁵ The difference will be, however, in how we proceed from there – in particular, how we act on our conclusions in the pastoral setting and how we relate to those with whom we disagree.

For those who conclude that these passages do not prohibit same-sex activity, pastoral care of homosexuals will, in most respects, be no different from that of anyone else. We will accompany them through the struggles and cycles of life as we would any other member of the congregation. However, we must also recognise that, for many Christians, this view is deeply disturbing. We will have to ask ourselves what it means to be communities characterised by humility, self-sacrifice, and compassion, especially when there is disagreement over this issue. Particular problems will arise if questions are raised regarding blessings or marriage. While some will consider this compatible with Scriptural principles such as covenant relationship and fidelity, others may not, and questions with regard to how far we should accommodate to prevailing and/or changing cultures, customs, and practices will have to be explored with sensitivity and discernment on all sides.

For those who conclude that these passages do require a prohibition, the pastoral responsibilities are rather different. Since this is in effect a matter of ‘law’, the aim will be to carry it out with wisdom and compassion, following Jesus’ example. Two things stand out in this regard. First, Jesus insists that law should serve the community and not the other way around (e.g. Mark 2.23-27). In other words, law is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Second, it is clear from the stories of Jesus’ life that he loved sinners and righteous alike. As James Gustafson says, this was ‘indiscriminating care for the just and the unjust’.²⁶ Nevertheless, it is equally clear that he took great exception to self-righteousness and hypocrisy on the part of religious leaders. When confronted by people whose main concern was to uphold the law, he refused to allow them to take the moral high ground, demanding that they ‘take the log out of their own eye’ before judging others (Matthew 7.5). Further, he was criticised for associating with those who had been declared ‘sinners’ by the religious authorities to such an extent that he was accused of

L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

²⁵ See, for example, Richard B. Hays, ‘Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies’ and Luke Timothy Johnson, ‘Debate and Discernment, Scripture and Spirit’, in *Virtues and Practices*, ed. by Murphy et al. pp. 214-16; 215-220.

²⁶ James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 244.

being a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11.19). If we wish to follow Jesus' example, then we will have to do some serious self-examination. Are we concerned primarily for the purity of our communities or for the care of those who are marginalised outsiders? Are we being consistent in our application of 'law' – applying the same high standards to ourselves in all areas of our lives as we require from homosexual people? At the very least, Jesus demands that we acknowledge our own weakness, before making judgements about other people.

Whichever conclusion we reach, a hermeneutic based on character ethics requires us to be highly cautious with regard to how we implement it in the pastoral setting. In both cases, we have to be acutely aware of the effects of our decision, both with regard to the individuals concerned and for the community as a whole. In both cases, we have to look to ourselves – being honest about our attitudes and motivations, and constantly on the alert for a lack of compassion, self-sacrifice, and humility in our actions and words. A character ethics approach does not require us to throw out the idea of law or principles. It does, however, challenge us with regard to our *attitude* to them, and how we put them into practice. It teaches us to filter our desire to be faithful to the biblical texts through the lens of humility, self-sacrifice, and love, and having done so, to carry out our decisions with compassion and grace.

Same-sex relationships and church unity

If this approach urges us to think carefully with regard to the pastoral care of individuals and congregations, it also has profound implications with regard to our understanding of our relationship to the Bible itself – no matter on which side of the argument we find ourselves. In the first place, it forces us to be honest about our failure to live up to our own standards with regard to obedience to Scripture. There can be no doubt that Christians have been guilty of selectivity and double standards, paying attention to certain sins and instructions whilst ignoring many more. As we have seen, the main thrust of the argument in Romans 1 is that we are all guilty of idolatry in one way or another. An attitude of humility and self-sacrifice might lead us to consider why the church has become so preoccupied with the question of same-sex relationships. As is frequently noted, Jesus was much more concerned with the idolatry with regard to money and power than he was with that which expresses itself in sexual misdemeanour (Matthew 6.24; Ezekiel 28; Revelation 18) – something which the church throughout its history has often forgotten.

Second, an attitude of self-sacrifice, humility, and compassion must surely lead us to admit that we might not be right. Whatever our conclusion

with regard to the question of same-sex relationship and the Bible, there is a chance that we might have got it wrong. The truth in all its fullness will not be revealed to us in the here and now. The question “What ought we to do?” carries with it the quest for certainty, and it is natural for us to want Scripture to provide it. However, our interpretation will always be incomplete and faulty – simply because of our human weakness. We see through a glass darkly, and will continue to do so until the end times, and we need the grace to agree to disagree.

Conclusion

I have suggested that the traditional hermeneutical approach to biblical ethics, which derives from deontology and utilitarianism, has led us into some difficulties with regard to the question of same-sex relationships. While it may help us with regard to the morality of homosexual activity, it has been less helpful when it comes to our pastoral response. Despite some exegetical uncertainties, the majority understanding is that same-sex relationships are disallowed by Scripture. However, the traditional inference that practising homosexuals should be excluded from our communities, or at least from leadership positions, has made the church vulnerable to charges of selectivity in its use of Scripture, hypocrisy with regard to recognising and tackling sin, and a failure to live up to biblical values such as compassion and mercy – charges which we must take very seriously indeed. Moreover, we have fallen into a state of impasse in the debate and deep division amongst ourselves.

In order to help us find a way through these problems, a hermeneutical approach based on character ethics was proposed. Rather than look for Scripture to tell us what to do, our hermeneutical starting-point is the question “What kind of people should we be?” The biblical narratives teach us how to live lives which are pleasing to God. Above all, we make Christ our ‘touchstone’ in all our ethical and pastoral decision-making and continuously look to Him to teach us how to be communities of people whose lives are characterised by humility, self-sacrifice, and compassion. How does this help us respond to same-sex relationships while maintaining unity amongst ourselves? Two suggestions have been made: first, with regard to our pastoral response, and second, with regard to our relationships with each other.

We will still reach different conclusions as to the interpretation of the salient texts. We may still decide that same-sex relationships should be prohibited in our communities, or that such a view is incompatible with principles of mercy and covenant. The difference, is, however, in how we proceed from there. Crucially, when we look to Christ’s example, we are

reminded that law and principle are given to serve and not enslave, and that we need constantly to examine our own lives before passing judgement on others. Our pastoral response to the question of same-sex relationships will be marked by a concern for the individuals involved and the community as a whole, rather than by a need to follow precept. We are not asked to ignore our conscience, but to act with wisdom and compassion towards others, and with self-scrutiny. Bearing in mind Christ's habit of associating with 'sinners', we will remember Paul's insistence that we *all* fall into this category. The more we adopt this attitude, the less we will be open to the charges of hypocrisy and double standards which are so frequently made against us.

This approach also informs our understanding of our relationship with Scripture itself, and with each other. An attitude of self-sacrifice, humility, and compassion should, at the very least, lead us to an admission: our interpretation of Scripture might be faulty, and it may be necessary to agree to disagree. Above all, there will be no place for the acrimony and vitriol which too often characterises debate on this subject. We will have to make decisions and to act on them, but obedience from this perspective means seeking wisdom rather than certainty, unity rather than unanimity, and a readiness to learn from our mistakes. Baptists have always sought to look to Christ, our 'touchstone', and to make him our highest authority. On the eve of his death, his desire was that his followers live in unity. Perhaps, even with regard to this most contentious of issues, we can go some way towards seeing an answer to his prayer.

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Book Reviews

Fran Porter, *Women and Men after Christendom: The Dis-ordering of Gender Relationships* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), 168 pages. ISBN: 978-1842277591.

Adrian Thatcher, *Redeeming Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225pages. ISBN: 978-0198744757.

Elaine Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women* (London: SPCK, 2015), 276 pages. ISBN: 978-0281075089.

Frances Adeney, *Women and Christian Mission: Ways of Knowing and Doing Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 300 pages. ISBN: 978-1498217194.

Gender in general, and particularly women's roles in church ministry and mission, continue to feature in theological conversations and new publications. Fran Porter's book, *Women and Men after Christendom: The Dis-ordering of Gender Relationships*, is part of the 'After Christendom' series which explores various issues from a post-Christendom perspective of being church. Porter's contribution tackles the difficult task of disentangling Christian theology and practice from Christendom assumptions of patriarchy which, as her volume convincingly demonstrates, pervade both theology and church practice in both implicit and explicit ways.

Research Fellow at The Queen's Foundation, Porter covers a vast territory that includes gender-related aspects of the development and growth of the Christian church; biblical and cultural hermeneutics of gender; and the theology of gender and contemporary politics in the church as well as beyond. She also manages to provide vivid and detailed descriptions of the changes brought by Christendom, including the change in memory of the practices and the roles of women in previous centuries.

The argument of the book may not be original – but then it does not claim to be. Instead, it fulfils its purpose by theologically re-imagining gender relationships in ways that are biblically faithful and contextually relevant. In terms of contemporary analysis, Porter focuses on the United Kingdom, so readers from other contexts will need to relate this to their own setting, but they are likely to find it a very competent as well as interesting survey of the field.

One of the strengths of this book is the clarity with which it is written, which nonetheless does not come at the expense of the depth of analysis and interpretation. Whilst being very readable as an introduction to the subject, it is also informative scholarship, especially in its review of the context of the New Testament writings and the formation and development of such church practices as ordination.

In *Redeeming Gender*, Adrian Thatcher, Honorary Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter, starts out with a hypothesis developed by Thomas Laqueur in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990). Laqueur argued that up until the eighteenth century, Western thought considered humanity – ‘man’ – to be of one sex. Within this single sex, there was a hierarchical continuum with men – the most perfect expression – at one end and women (with the same genitals, only hidden inside the body) at the other.

Thatcher traces the emergence of two-sex theory during the late modernity in both Western thought in general and in Western theology. Critiquing both the hierarchical arrangement of one-sex theory as well as the two-sex interpretation of gender with its search for the ‘essence’ of maleness and femaleness, Thatcher proposes the concept of a ‘human continuum’, but free from gender-based gradations of perfection.

The theological argument that Thatcher builds is primarily Christological: Christ, the image of God in the midst of marred humanity, represents the essence of that same humanity in its restored state, and in his resurrected body relativises such distinctions as gender. In a similar vein, Thatcher also uses Trinitarian ontology to argue for equality-in-difference in re-appropriating theologically faithful gender relations.

The book’s historical overview of the one-sex theory and its subsequent replacement by two-sex theory is primarily based on secondary sources. Perhaps in this respect the work tries to achieve too much, and in too cursory a manner. The same could be said about its overview of the presence of two-sex theory in the ‘Churches’ theologians’, which lasts five pages and refers only to Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth. The concluding chapter, which discusses the ‘unfinished business in the churches’, reviews the practice of women’s ordination in three paragraphs: one on the practice in the Roman Catholic church; one in the Orthodox church; and one in the Church of England. This hardly does justice to the issues involved, and either requires a much longer treatment, or a more modest aim.

However, the argument at the core of *Redeeming Gender* – namely, that dividing humanity into two genders is not necessarily helpful – certainly deserves to be heard, especially in terms of its value in providing one of the

most thoughtful responses to inter-sex conditions. As an avenue of tackling sexism in church theology and practices, this volume represents a stimulating and provocative contribution to the current debate.

The idea of women as ‘misbegotten men’ resurfaces in the Christian tradition in a number of ways, and can be seen as one of the underlying causes of violence against women. The latter topic is the focus of Elaine Storkey’s *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women*. As a theologian and sociologist with an impressive record of publications, as well as in her role as President of Tearfund for seventeen years, Storkey is well placed to address depressingly multifaceted and deeply ingrained forms of gender-based violence (GBV). Highlighting the scope of such violence across the globe, Storkey wants to query the reasons underlying the pandemic proportions of GBV: that is, attitudes towards women and their value (or the lack thereof).

Written for a non-specialist audience, but anticipating a thoughtful reader, the book provides a detailed overview of various forms of GBV: selective abortion and infanticide, female genital mutilation, child and enforced marriages, honour killings and revenge crimes, violence in the home, trafficking and prostitution, rape, and war-time sexual violence. Even for a reader familiar with the extent of the problem, these chapters paint an overwhelmingly depressive picture. The description of these various forms of violence is well documented, even if statistics in some of these areas can be particularly difficult to collect and ascertain. The numbers are given a human face by references to and quotations from actual cases.

Storkey then proceeds to survey the reasons underlying the prevalence of GBV and to critique the explanations provided by socio-biologists and evolutionary psychologists. In turning to social science – her own field – Storkey acknowledges a whole variety of perspectives, but focuses on the phenomenon of culture(s) of patriarchy, and argues that GBV is part and parcel of the larger problem of male domination.

The penultimate chapter is entitled ‘Religion and women’, but in fact is a review of the presence of patriarchy in Islam. Likewise, the last chapter, entitled ‘A fuller picture’, deals with patriarchy in Christian scriptures and practice. It is perhaps here that the book achieves less than its title promises. It offers a truly impressive review of GBV, as well as some very helpful insights into the way patriarchy sanctions violence against women, but in terms of *overcoming* such violence, it suggests only a few preliminary ways to go about the sources of religious authority and practice, which are then further limited to Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. That said, this volume still makes an important contribution to understanding GBV.

How do women approach the practice and theology of mission? This theme is explored by Frances S. Adeney, Professor Emerita of Evangelism and Global Mission at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Her book, *Women and Christian Mission: Ways of Knowing and Doing Theology*, appears as part of the series on 'Missional Church, Public Theology, World Christianity', which seeks to examine the theology of mission from the perspective of World Christianity. Adeney's work reviews such key themes as mission praxis, language of theology and mission, identity, spirituality, approaches to leadership, and the use of art. The breadth of these themes signals the risk of too wide of a scope, and in several aspects the book does not manage to avoid this.

Adeney sees her study as primarily sociological, seeing her task as principally that of reporting women's 'ways of knowing and doing' mission theology. The study is based on interviews with women from different Christian contexts. However, the actual use of the material gleaned from the interviews seems to be rather limited, and what become clear are the author's own reactions as well as recollections of her own experience of mission field and teaching theology.

The volume is somewhat difficult to navigate and would have benefited from more careful editing and more rigorous referencing. This is one of the struggles the reader must be ready for. Another is a rather vague logic of the progression of the chapters, coupled with numerous repetitions of ideas and incidents. (For example, the same material arising from one of the interviews is reported three times in different chapters.) Many valuable insights and observations are offered, but rather than exploring them to any depth, the discussion jumps to the next point. Many other authors' ideas are used quite fleetingly, and often without any bibliographical referencing.

Thus Adeney's overall focus is difficult to discern: her title would suggest the book is about women and/in Christian mission, but the 'mission' is used in a somewhat loose fashion. Examples referred to range from Sheryl Sandberg to *The Hunger Games* to female theologians not known to be either practitioners of mission or missiologists.

Perhaps the best way to describe this work is to see it as a kaleidoscope of fascinating themes and stories, and a good point of departure for further, in-depth explorations of its topics.

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